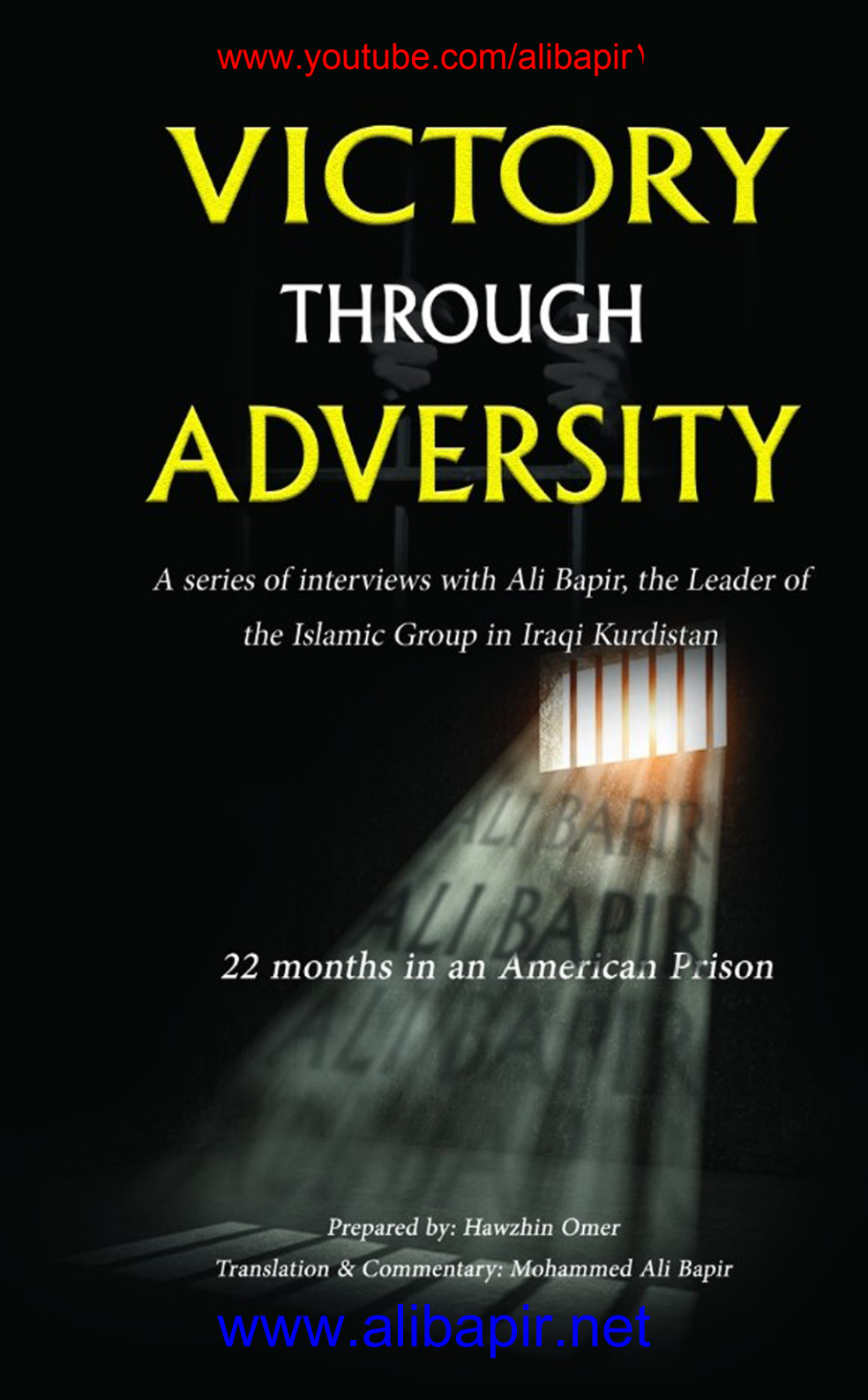
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VICTORY THROUGH ADVERSITY

A series of interviews with Ali Bapir, the Leader of the Islamic Group in Iraqi Kurdistan



22 months in an American Prison

Prepared by: Hawzhin Omer

Translation & Commentary: Mohammed Ali Bapir

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In the name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful

He said, "My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant. So his Lord responded to him and averted from him their plan. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing" (Quran 12: 33-34).



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NOTES & COMMENTARY

Mohammed Ali Bapir

Iraqi Kurdistan is officially known as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and is also occasionally referred to as Southern Kurdistan. Kurds consider this Kurdish area of Iraq to be one of four regions that make up Greater Kurdistan, the others being in Syria, known as Rojava or Western Kurdistan, north-western Iran, known as Eastern Kurdistan, and parts of south-east Turkey, known as Northern Kurdistan.

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government, the KRG, which has its administrative capital in Erbil. The regional Parliament consists of 110 seats. From 2005 until August 2015 the president was Massoud Barzani. The Constitution of Iraq defines the Kurdistan Region as being in a federation with Iraq, and both Arabic and Kurdish are official languages. Within the Region there are four areas - Duhoh, Erbil, Suleimani and Halabja – which, together, comprise just under 50,000 square kilometres, with a population of approximately six million people. During the crisis of 2014, Kurdish forces took control of parts of Northern Iraq, bringing the population under Kurdish control to eight million.

The Kurdistan Region was established in 1970, when the area was granted autonomy following an agreement reached between the Kurdish opposition and the Iraqi government. However, the agreement was never put into force and, as a result, by 1974 Northern Iraq was embroiled in the Second

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Iraqi-Kurdish War. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Iraqi Kurdistan was devastated, and in 1991 the Kurds in the north, and Shia Arabs in the south, rose up against Saddam Hussein. The Peshmerga, Kurdistan's military force, drove Iraqi forces out of the northern area.

The results of the First Civil Was in 1991 created the opportunity for Kurdish self-rule and enabled the return of refugees. In October 1991, the last Iraqi forces left Kurdistan. In 1992 the two largest political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), joined to form the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the ratification of a new constitution in 2005.

It is against this background that Ali Bapir's struggle to ensure the autonomy of Kurdistan has to be viewed. However, this book provides not only invaluable information on the political situation at a very complex period in the history of the Kurds but perhaps more significantly it tells of one man's struggle with himself in the face of the most severe adversity to maintain his core beliefs and to explore his own spirituality. He met the challenges that he faced both in terms of physical and mental abuse with equanimity and through those trials emerged with an even greater conviction of the justice of his cause and with absolute confidence in the efficacy of his Islamic faith to enable all mankind to enjoy the benefits of our God-given world and to prepare for acceptance in the next. The lack of bitterness, despite what he endured, shines through and provides a beacon of moderation and hope in an increasingly extremist and violent world. The story of his treatment in prison and his reactions to it serve as an example to all people of goodwill, of all faiths and none, because what is central to his triumph over adversity is his compassion for humanity and his belief in a personal relationship with his God.

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ALI BAPIR

Ali Bair is known as Mamosta Ali Bapir and Sheikh Ali Bapir. He was born in the Peshdar region of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1961. He founded the Kurdish Islamic Group in 2001, an organisation that is generally considered to be a Kurdish nationalist party committed to the creation of an Islamic democracy in Kurdistan. The group strives for self-determination for the Kurds and is socially conservative, reflecting the ideology and political views of its founder.

Ali Bapir holds moderate religious views and calls for co-existence within a democratic society. He has articulated his modern interpretation of Islam, based on the Quran, his political views and his aspirations for his people in more than ninety books.

He is currently the leader of the Islamic Group, and in the 2009 Iraqi General Elections was one of the top ten candidates in the whole country. He works to maintain good relations with the European Union the United States, and other regional powers.

Shortly before his arrest in July, 2003 he broke away from the main Kurdish group, the Islamic Movement, and set up his headquarters near Khurmal, near the Iranian border. Very near to this location, the Ansar of Islam, an extremist group that had been linked to Al Qaeda, also had its camp. The Americans bombed Ali Bapir's camp on March 22, 2003, killing many of his followers, possibly mistakenly believing that they were attached to the Ansar camp.

Believing that the United States should compensate the families of those killed in the attack, Ali Bapir agreed to meet

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with representatives of the American government to discuss his claims. The meeting was arranged for July 10, 2003 near the Kurdish town of Dorkan. On the way to the meeting he was stopped at a checkpoint and he and his companions were blindfolded and flown by helicopter, initially to Baghdad, and then to Camp Cropper.

Camp Cropper was the maximum security prison where Saddam Hussein was held until he was executed in December 2003, a prison that is still in use today though now administered by the Iraqi government.

This book comprises of a series of 9 interviews, given by Ali Bapir over a period of several months, telling the story of his arrest, and the physical and mental abuse he suffered at the hands of his gaolers. During that 22-month period of his imprisonment he stopped eating and lost 30 pounds. Medical staff were so concerned at this dramatic weight loss that they demanded that the prison authorities treat him more humanely.

For almost the entire first year of his imprisonment he was confined to an 8 foot square cell. In that time, he had contact only with his guards and interrogators from the CIA, FBI and British Intelligence, all of whom constantly accused him of planning attacks on allied forces, supporting Ansar, and being in collaboration with the Ba'athist regime.

Eventually, the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison caused such a public outcry that conditions at Camp Cropper improved and he was allowed to write and receive heavily censored letters from his family, telephone his wife on occasion, and consort with his fellow prisoners. It was from this point onwards that he strove to help and guide all

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of those imprisoned with him, no matter what their background, to a better understanding of Islam and instructed those willing to listen on how to become true Muslims.

Despite being told by one of his interrogators that there was no evidence against him, he continued to be detained. He was finally released on 28 April, 2005, and since that time has striven, notwithstanding his incarceration at the hands of the Americans, to build links with the Western powers. He summed up his aspirations in a speech before his arrest, in January 2003:

"Our policy is that we enter into fraternity and co-operation with all Islamic groups. We seek such fraternal relations with Islamic parties and organisations, Islamic figures, and groups that follow a Salafi tradition or a Sufi or a scientific tradition. In the Komala Islami we believe that the group must be open-minded and seek fraternity with all those who call or act for Islam. If we see a mistake, we will try to correct it through dialogue and by creating a fraternal atmosphere".

Topic 1

The first of Ali Bapir's interviews was held at the Hawler Komal Television Studio on 13/06/2005. The journalist conducting the interviews had agreed with him that the discussion would take one topic or issue at a time. In this first interview the questions concentrate initially on the injustices that the Islamic Group had been subjected to in the period leading up to Ali Bapir's arrest.

To begin with Ali Bapir explains that prior to the foundation of the Islamic Group, its predecessor, the Islamic Movement, had been located in the Hawraman and Sharazoor ar-

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eas, and the crucial points of explanation as to the reasons behind the disintegration of the Islamic Movement are put forward. Repeatedly, during the course of the interview, Ali Bapir refers to the meeting in August 2001 of the Islamic Unity Movement at the end of which a "summary of its deliberations was published" [T1: 1]. A number of the delegates to the Conference, however, disagreed with the conclusions reached and after nine months, during which the agreed proposals had not been put into practice, Ali Bapir, and those who shared his commitment to the published proposals, concluded that there was no alternative but to form a break-away group and did so on May 31, 2001.

Ali Bapir stresses continuously that, as far as he was concerned, the new Islamic Group (IG) was to all intents and purposes the same entity as the Islamic Unity Movement (IUM), and that all that had changed was the name. The new group made it clear that it regarded itself as the natural successor to the IUM and maintained its core values and objectives. Consequently, the majority of those who had been members of the IUM joined the IG, bringing with them their resources and bases. There was, however, a new emphasis on the promotion of Islam.

Even so, the IUM did not disappear and Sheikh Barzinji became its new leader. Ali Bapir provides information on a number of other groups, including Jundul-al-Islam and smaller groups affiliated to Tawid and Hamas who, in due course, amalgamated to form Ansar Al Islam, with Mamosta Krekar as leader. This historical background is important in enabling an understanding of how Ansar al Islam came into being, especially as it played such an important part, albeit largely unwittingly, in the later history of the IG.

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Having provided the background information on key players in the region, Ali Bapir then goes on to assess the importance of the martyrdom of Mamosta Abudullah Qasrey, who he describes as "talented and powerful" [T1:3] and much loved by his people. Qasrey was murdered at the Tasloja checkpoint, Ali Bapir says, by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK later claimed that the assassination had been carried out in error as it was thought that members of Ansar had been traveling in the car. Ali Bapir uses this as one example of the many injustices that the IG has suffered at the hands of others at this time.

Ali Bapir cites the correspondence between himself and the leader of the PUK, Mam Jalal Talabani, in which the PUK took responsibility for the assassination which, in Ali Bapir's view, was insufficient under Sharia law to conclude the matter. He points out that even if the murder had been a mistake, there had to be consequences for those who had perpetrated the crime; it was not acceptable to simply "bury the incident" [T1:4].

He gives a further example of the injustice the IG suffered, this time at the hands of the U.S. forces in which forty three members were killed and more than fifty wounded. Ali Bapir expressed his confusion as to the motive behind the attacks, since the IG's position on the U.S. had been articulated very clearly and was not overtly anti-American. He says the IG regretted that a non-Muslim power was intervening in a Muslim country but acknowledged that the removal of the Ba'athist regime was a desirable outcome of that action. He states very openly that he would have preferred any international support for regime change in Iraq to have been more indirect, leaving the Iraqi people in charge of their own des-

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tinies However, the IG welcomed the fall of Saddam Hussein. Given this stance, Ali Bapir could see no justification for the bombing of IG's bases by the U.S.

Ali Bapir rejected the interviewer's claim that the leadership should have anticipated American actions and abandoned the bases, and explores the issue of whether the attack had been deliberate or a mistake. He also examines the issue of whether the PUK was compliant with the U.S. in the raid. He concludes that the Americans had mistakenly attacked the IG bases, believing them to be those of the Ansar group that were located nearby. Once again, while willing to accept American statements that the attack had been an error, as in his previous example, Ali Bapir still puts forward the view that reparation was due.

With regard to the PUK, Ali Bapir explains that he had made it clear to the PUK leadership that IG and Ansar were two separate, and very different, entities and that the IG did not want to be associated with or even physically located near to them. In due course, at Ali Bapir's instigation, IG did move away from the area in which Ansar had based itself. The interviewer then returns to Sheikh Abdulla Qasrey's murder and asks how this had impacted on his thinking. The response indicates his disappointment that the PUK would not work with the IG in the way he had hoped over the investigation into the murder. Ali Bapir is dismissive of the PUK claims that the Sheikh had failed to stop at the checkpoint when ordered to do so and asserts that he had been shot well before reaching it, and is clearly upset that even after his release the matter had not been fully resolved and the PUK had simply expressed regret that it had happened.

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The interviewer presses Ali Bapir for further comment about the identity of those who had carried out the attack but he replies that while he was convinced that members of the PUK knew who were responsible, he did not know the identities of those who had carried out the assassination. He states categorically that there was sufficient evidence to identify those involved and it was up to the PUK to find the culprits.

Having exhausted this line of questioning, the interview returns to Ali Bapir's views on the role of the Americans in Iraq. He reiterates his opinion that while the Americans were not welcome, the fall of the Ba'athist regime was. He expanded on his views, declaring that as the Americans had not come to fight the IG, he saw no reason to fight them. He is very definite about the fact that the Americans had come to Iraq for their own purposes, not for the benefit of the Kurdish people, and those who welcomed the Americans were misguided. He goes on to explore the whole concept of globalization, which he believes is a euphemism for Americanization. He sees American involvement in Iraq as being primarily motivated by economic and geo-political considerations rather than any altruistic attempt to remove a vile dictatorship.

The interviewer then moves on to a discussion on a conference, pre-invasion, in London at which various groups agreed to support the US-led campaign against Iraq. Ali Bapir was not able to attend that meeting because he had been unable to obtain visas in Tehran to travel to London. He expresses his unhappiness that the Iranian authorities, who did not approve of the upcoming meeting, would not help facilitate his attendance. He does not blame the Iranians entirely

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and notes that allies in England had also failed to help the IG delegation attend the meeting. However, he does suggest that this inability to attend could have been the reason for later American hostility towards the IG. Two members of the IG had, in fact, managed to attend and they confirmed that their group supported the removal of the Ba'athist regime in particular, but that did not amount to support for an American-led invasion of Iraq. From Ali Bapir's perspective, the meeting was, or at least should have been, about exploring alternative ways to topple the regime and, indeed, representatives from the IG had gone to other such meetings in New York and Salahaddin. Ali Bapir confirms that if he had been able to get to the London conference, he would have done so and argued the case for alternatives to invasion.

Returning to the foundation of Ansar, Ali Bapir outlines the history of that group and, in general terms, puts the blame for the rise of extremist Islamic groups in Kurdistan partially at the door of the KDP. He believes that the KDP's actions in imprisoning a number of Islamists without trial or charge had been a catalyst in the move to the extreme by many of them and was a direct result of being so badly treated. In his view, many of those disenchanted Muslims traveled to Afghanistan and distributed extreme literature which, in its turn, influenced others who were dissatisfied with how their religion was being represented. He goes on to explain the steps he took, with others, to minimize the spread of extremist ideology, which involved turning down an offer to lead the group that ultimately became Ansar. He spends considerable time outlining the differences in his views with those of Ansar. This part of the interview is particularly illuminating in terms of gaining an understanding of the various stances taken by key groups [T1:12-24].

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Ali Bapir headed a committee that was set up to hold talks with Hamas and outlines in detail the steps he took to persuade them not to indulge in the violence that had become their hallmark but concedes that he was unable to do so. He puts this failure down to the fact that they were not capable of understanding his rationale. He categorizes their leadership as being "ordinary peshmargas" [T1:16] who did not have the learning or intellectual capacity to acquire any "deep understanding of religion" [T1:16]. This theme of the necessity of Islamic leaders being immersed in learning is one that Ali Bapir continuously returns to throughout the series of interviews.

Following the questioning of the interviewer, Ali Bapir expands on why he thought extremist ideas developed within the Islamic movement, explaining that it was not possible to pin down the exact reasons for its emergence but rather expresses the view that it was due to a combination of several factors and circumstances. He cited the KDP's closure of all the mosques in Hawler, the removal of Imams, and outright violence against those that did not conform to their views as the catalysts that provoked reaction. The youth of extremists is also mentioned as a contributory factor. The young people, Ali Bapir believes, felt particularly aggrieved and, being young, prone to "zeal and hot headedness" [T1:17]. He identifies a third factor was the example of the Taliban and other extremists whose literature found its way to Iraq and influenced many.

The final factor, Ali Bapir contends, was the lack of appreciation of the dangers of the move towards extremism that resulted in the leadership of the Islamic Movement failing to take the steps necessary to quash this tendency. He concludes

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that the underlying factor that led to extremism was the lack of real understanding of the tenets of Islam and the misinterpretations that permeated the extremist groups. He makes numerous references to the guidance offered by the Prophet (peace be upon him) to his companions on the issues of violence. However, he accepts that he had limited success in his attempts to persuade those who had joined Ansar to return to the IG and that the majority, unfortunately, were enthralled by Ansar's militant agenda. He argues that their ideology was flawed because it did not take into account society as it really and this was because none of their leaders were schooled sufficiently in the teachings of the Quran or the Sunnah. He is particularly scathing of Ansar's belief that anyone who did not agree with them was not a true Muslim, and explains in some depth the theological and ideological flaws in their beliefs. He provides a series of examples from the Quran that demonstrates that their approach was rejected by the teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) [T1:21-23].

It is interesting to note that despite these fundamental differences, Ansar might still have joined the IG if Ali Bapir had agreed to "declare war on the PUK" [T1:23], which he felt, in all honour, that he could not do. This examination of the relationship between the IG and Ansar leads to an articulation of Ali Bapir's interpretation of what is, and is not, Islamic. What emerges is a clear exposition of a moderate view of Islam, based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah, and a rejection of zealotry in all its forms. Ali Bapir refuses to confirm reports that Ansar had, on several occasions, attempted to assassinate him but acknowledges and explains Ansar's antipathy towards him and how that manifested itself.

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One of the claims made by Ansar was that Ali Bapir was an Iranian puppet. The slur was meant to weaken his influence amongst the Kurds and he vigorously denies this allegation. He makes it clear that the claim the IG was backed financially by Iran was false and, indeed, points out that the Iranians had been far from happy at the formation of his group, especially as that had not been consulted. He goes on to outline the nature of his relationship with Iran and it is obvious from this account that dealings were not always smooth or easy. However, he does confirm that his group did meet with Iranian officials and it was on this basis that Ansar based their propaganda. Ai Bapir accepted that Ansar did have some success in distorting the image of the IG in the Arab world and expresses regret that his group did not have the resources to counter the lies that were propagated by them. Even the IG's support, or more precisely, refusal to work against some of the smaller Islamic groups, was used against it.

A related question focuses on rumours that elements of Al-Qaeda were based near the Ansar base. Ali Bapir has no information as to the truth or otherwise of that story but reveals that while imprisoned he had been asked about it on a number of occasions. He reiterates his contention that contact with Ansar was based on his attempts to renounce their violence. Despite several questions pushing him on this point, Ali Bapir is unequivocal in his denial of any working relationship between the IG and Ansar, and the fact that some of the families of their members lived amongst them he insisted should not be misconstrued.

Ansar's conflict with the PUK, and the IG's role in it, is then put under the microscope. Ali Bapir characterizes the

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conflict between them as a war, in which both sides acted brutally, but he accepts that such things happened in war. However, he is disturbed by the treatment of prisoners, particularly by Ansar, which he argues was un-Islamic. His conclusion is that the war is harmful to both groups.

Among other observations about what he considers to be Ansar's zealotry is a story of members of that group insisting that pictures of a woman on the wrapping of soap being delivered as part of an aid package had to be cut out before being distributed. He gives other examples of Ansar's misapplication of Islamic law.

Any suggestion that Ansar was in any way protected by the IG, as reported by some newspaper journalists, is resolutely rejected and he again insists that the IG took a neutral position in the quarrel between Ansar and the PUK while denying the PUK's claim that Ali Bapir had supported Ansar's attacks on them. The lengthy discussion on the relationship between the three groups clarifies the IG's stance vis a vis both and, backed by compelling evidence, suggests that Ali Bapir's claims to neutrality were well-founded. A fuller understanding of what was a complicated set of interaction will be gained by reading the actual interview text of the responses to the relevant questions on this matter [T1:40-42].

Having explored this issue in some detail, the interviewer returns to the injustices suffered by the IG and tries to elicit from Ali Bapir his assessment as to who bears the brunt of the blame for those events. Al Bapir talks initially about why the IG had not moved from the bases that were attacked by the Americans, despite the fact that he had urged his followers to do so. Part of the delay in moving was, according

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to him, due to PUK reluctance to help them move at all, and when it was agreed that they should the necessary arrangements to facilitate the move were not in place. He does not accept the criticism that the IG was ill-prepared and had not anticipated the likelihood of an attack. On the contrary, he recounts in detail the efforts head had made to persuade Ansar of the dangers of continuing their aggressive policies, which were attracting American attention and endangering them all. The difficulties the IG suffered in the lead up and after the move to Darashmana following the bombing of its base are recounted in graphic detail. One positive development was the support provided, albeit belatedly, by the PUK to the group and the mediation of Iran. It was in this period that the decision was made to take up arms against the Ba'athist regime. Ali Bapir emphasizes that the decisions was not taken lightly but was necessary to defend Kurdistan. He points out that his supporters had not taken up arms to win Kurdish independence but were forced into fighting for a regime change because of the intolerable levels of violence visited upon them by the Iraqi regime.

He expresses the view that once the regime had collapsed he had hoped that a democratic system would emerge and that there would no longer be any need for the IG to be militarized. Circumstances meant that it was unsafe to abandon all their weapons, but there was general agreement to dissolve the military wing. Ali Bapir believes that the new situation provided the opportunity to use peaceful processes to further their cause and, for that reason, he supported the concept of disarmament. He acknowledges that a number of his supporters found it a difficult policy to accept but they trusted the leadership and agreed. The dispersal of the IG's peshmargas was, Ali Bapir concedes, seen by some as a mis-

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take but he believes this was not the case. He did, as he had already said, view the delay in leaving their bases as an error and, in hindsight, feels that he had wasted too much time trying to persuade Ansar to abandon their violent practices. He explains why so much time was spent in that attempt to win them round and confirms that some of his supporters would have preferred to give up the attempt sooner [T1:43-46].

The theme of who had made mistakes continues as the interviewer probes Ali Bapir's views on American involvement in Iraq further. Ali Bapir's conclusion is that the fundamental American mistakes were taking military action without specific U.N. approval, and worse, doing so without a clear plan of action as to how to manage the post conflict phase of the operation. The result, as far as Ali Bapir is concerned, was the wholesale destruction of swathes of Iraq, including its physical and political power structures. He comments that, in effect, the Americans lost the goodwill of many who lost their livelihoods by their actions. Part of Ali Bapir's assessment relates to the U.S. Intelligence Service for which he has little respect. He cites the false claim that the regime was manufacturing chemical weapons as being one example of the poor intelligence that the Americans had about the situation in the country. He speculates as to whether those who supported the American invasion fed them incorrect information but, in general, feels that a super power, with the level of resources that America had available to it, should not have made so many mistakes. Numerous examples are given of his attempts to rebut the claims being made, based on false information, about the IG and he describes a number of meetings held between himself, his supporters, and American officials. It was on his way to the third of these meetings that Ali Bapir was arrested.

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Ali Bapir outlines in detail the case that the IG had for compensation from the Americans and the reaction of those officers to those claims. He says quite explicitly that many of the points he raised were accepted and, indeed, one American official went so far as to apologize for U.S. actions and agreed to help organize further meetings to explore the matter further. In addition to the meetings, Ali Bapir confirms that he wrote to Colin Powell, the U.S. Secretary of State at the time, outlining the IG's stance. With the benefit of hindsight, Ali Bapir concludes that, despite everything that happened, the lesson he learned was that it was still the best policy to do things properly, to act based on the tenets of Islam as proposed in the Quran and the Sunnah, but to do so in a realistic and pragmatic way. He also suggests that the IG's relationships with other new groups were not as strong as they should have been and that it had not presented itself well to the outside world. This last weakness, he believes, enabled opponents to characterize them unfairly as terrorists. From his perspective, that deficiency in the managements of image has to be addressed.

A lengthy further exposition of the falsehoods told about IG and the distortions of Islamic teachings proposed by groups such as Ansar follows. As at every stage, Ali Bapir turns consistently to the Quran to illustrate his points. His explanation of Islamic teachings on such crucial matters as punishment and legal action is comprehensive and warrants special attention from the reader [T1:52-55].

After this lengthy exposition the interviewer begins to return his attention back to the death of Mamosta Abdullah Qasrey, who was a close personal friend of Ali Bapir. The affection and admiration Ali Bapir has for his friend is ob-

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vious through his comments and his sadness and anger at his death is very apparent. He refuses to accept the excuse that his death might have been a mistake and points out that he was a highly recognizable figure. He is clearly upset that other groups did not "offer even one iota of sympathy for their part in this tragedy" [T1:57]. Although so devastated by the death of his friend, Ali Bapir claims that he never harbored any thoughts of revenge. For him, true revenge "lies in achieving the goals of our group" [T1:58], which he summed up as achieving a society that lived according to Islamic rules. For him, pursuing personal revenge would have been un-Islamic and, again, quotes from the Quran to re-enforce his standpoint.

The interviewer ends Topic 1 by asking Ali Bapir for a description of the bombing raid on the IG base when so many followers were killed and wounded. He also asks what actions Ali Bapir took in the immediate aftermath. He states that it was in the context of his desire to achieve justice for those killed in the raid, and to prevent further atrocities on the IG, that he entered into discussions with the Americans, despite the fact that many warned him of the personal danger to himself in going to meet them.

Topic 2

The second of Ali Bapir's interviews was held at the Hawler Komal Television Studio on 13/06/2005. The interviewer makes it clear that he wants to concentrate in this session on the specific details of Ali Bapir's arrest. Before starting his account however, Ali Bapir recounts the details of a dream he had some time prior to his arrest, which he believed had been sent directly to him from God. The contents of this

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dream came true and Ali Bapir tells us that it was to prove an inspiration and support to him in the long months of his incarceration. He explains his reaction to this dream, alongside another one that he had while in prison. What emerges is the close personal relationship Ali Bapir has with God and an exploration, based on his knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah, of the place of dreams in Islamic theology [T2:1-2].

Returning to the main point of this particular interview session, Ali Bapir briefly explains the circumstances leading up to his decision to attend the meeting with American officials. It was on the journey to the meeting that he was seized. He acknowledges that many of his colleagues had warned him of the personal dangers he was opening himself up to, but argues that he simply could not just hide himself away. He states that he certainly did not want to be arrested and took all the sensible precautions that were available to him to safeguard his freedom. However, when he was informed that a meeting had been arranged, he decided that he had to meet the American officials to put forward the IG's case for compensation, as well as to present its overall political stance [T2:3].

He then goes on to outline the events that culminated in his arrest. He asserts that he and his entourage felt they had no reason to fear arrest as they had been invited to attend a pre-arranged meeting. In the event, while those on the scene confirmed that they were aware of the meeting, and who he was, Ali Bapir was still arrested. Ali Bapir is extremely balanced in his description of his treatment at the hands of those arresting him. He refers to the humiliation he felt, as well as the physical discomfort of being in handcuffs and blindfolded, but he insists that the American soldieries did show him a degree of respect [T2:4].

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He goes on to recount how he was eventually taken to Baghdad after a brief stop in Mosul. Before exploring further details of those initial hours following his arrest, the interviewer asks Ali Bapir for his assessment of the individuals he should have met in the Ashur Hotel and of the relationship with American officials at that time. During his response, Ali Bapir takes the opportunity to clarify his thinking on his attempts, despite contrary advice from many, to engage with the U.S. [T2:6].

Not unsurprisingly, he expresses his disquiet about being arrested, and the unhappiness he felt at being imprisoned, and it is easy for the reader to empathise with him on this matter. He states that had never before been imprisoned and had led an extremely honorable life. Despite his natural concern, he states that he was not frightened and recited the Quran constantly to himself to keep his spirits up. He says that he put all thoughts of death from him, and that having put all thoughts of death from him, the fear of death had no hold over him [T2:8].

At various points after his arrest, Ali Bapir tells us that he insisted to his captors that his arrest was a mistake. Inevitably, he muses on whether he was going to be taken to Guantanamo, or somewhere similar. As it transpired, interrogations began very soon after his arrest, but in response to probing questions he insists that his interrogators were all American [T2:9].

The interviewer explores further the reasons, given that there had been warnings about American intentions to arrest him, why he had not fled the country. Ali Bapir staunchly defends his decisions, which he insists were based on his duty

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to his people. He also explains that he had refused to allow his guards to engage in any conflict with the Americans at the roadblock because he had believed that his arrest was an error that would be put right, and in any event the American military might was too great to contemplate resisting. In terms of who bore responsibility for his arrest, Ali Bapir is adamant that whether or not others were complicit, ultimate blame lay with the Americans themselves, and he is scathing about the lack of respect shown by the American leadership, not only for himself but also for other leaders who were similarly arrested [T2:10-11].

The interviewer delves into who exactly was involved in the arrest in an attempt to establish if anyone other than the Americans were involved. Ali Bapir does not identify any others but concedes that others may have been complicit [T2:13].

In summing up, Ali Bapir assess why he was arrested by the Americans and cites American lack of consistency in the doctrines they propound and their actions on the ground. He refers to a lack of understanding on the part of the Kurdish people as to the nature of American policy contributing to situation that enabled his imprisonment. He sees his imprisonment as a trial ordained by Allah to strengthen his resolve and his faith [T2:15].

He recounts a story from his youth, illustrating the fact that throughout his life he had held firm to his principles, and having done so found it hard to accept the terrible situation in which his arrest placed him. This story is worth considering in some detail as it illustrates very clearly how Ali Bapir thinks and, in particular, his utter conviction of the need to live a life in good faith [T2:16].

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The interview for Topic 2 ends with Ali Bapir telling of his continuing sadness on every occasion that he passes the location where he was arrested as it reminds him of his helplessness during the period of his arrest and the disingenuousness of American claims to be the protectors of human rights and democracy [T2:18].

Topic 3

The third of Ali Bapir's interviews was held at the Hawler Komal Television Studio on 13/06/2005. This interview concentrates on the provision of a detailed account of the physical characteristics of Camp Cropper and intimate, and often harrowing, descriptions of the humiliation and ill-treatment that Ali Bapir suffered at the hands of his captors.

At the time of his arrest, Ali Bapir says he was not familiar with Camp Cropper or how it came into being. A brief history of the camp is provided here to enable the reader to more fully understand the nature of the institution. Camp Cropper, situated near the International Airport in Baghdad, was opened by the United States Army as a high value detention site (HVD). Its initial capacity when it was set up in April 2003 by the 115th Military Police Battalion was 163 but this gradually expanded to house 2000 detainees. It was named after Staff Sergeant Kenneth Cropper who was killed at the Pentagon in 2002. Not long after its inception the role of the camp was expanded to be a Corps Holding Area (CHA). It was described as a short term holding area with the concept being that detainees would be held there for no more than 72 hours before being moved on to other detainee centres where there were longer term facilities. However, this plan never materialized and more and more "high value" detainees, such

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as Ali Bapir, were incarcerated in a facility not designed for long term prisoners.

Many of the criticisms that Ali Bapir makes of the camp stem from this total inadequacy of the facilities available, which he feels contributed to the appalling levels of inhumane treatment. Even before Ali Bapir arrived, the camp had been the subject of controversy. The New York Times had reported its illegal and improper use by the Head of the CIA, with the support of the Secretary of State, as a secret prison where inmates' names were withheld from the Red Cross. When the Red Cross were finally given access, in 2003, it reported, and criticized, the severe conditions, harsh treatment by guards, and the poor medical care. It is in the context of these known violations of International law that Ali Bapir's description of the camp and his treatment should be viewed.

In this long interview section Ali Bapir provides fascinating details of, and glimpses into, the day to day life in Camp Cropper. Given the information and photos now available about the conditions in the camp, his account comes across as measured and he avoids any sensationalism in his description of what was, undoubtedly, in particular in the early days, a traumatic experience. If anything, there is a sense that he underplays the misery and suffering to which he was subjected and he retains a determination to see the best in every person and situation.

The interview opens with a description of the journey to Camp Cropper and, even at this point, the interrogations to which Ali Bapir was subjected. His account of the lack of daylight, the inability to perform normal ablutions, all combined to make it difficult for him to carry out his obligatory schedule of prayers. It is obvious that this caused him great distress [T3:1-3].

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His first few days in the camp were in isolation, held in a small cell that he describes in some detail. The lack of facilities for basic human needs highlight the humiliating circumstances in which he found himself. He gives a very vivid description of the prison as a whole and provides some information as to the identity of his fellow inmates. The picture he paints is of a grim, depressing institution that dehumanized both those imprisoned within it and those tasked with guarding the prisoners [T3:3-4]. Ali Bapir also recounts here how the camp was on occasion subject to attack, or near to attacks occurring outside its walls. Though none of the inmates were killed, the experience was terrifying [T3:5].

A considerable amount of the next part of the interview is spent on Ali Bapir describing, in a very dispassionate way, his experience of being held in isolation for long periods and how he managed his time. He states that the first 3 months of his imprisonment were spent totally in isolation, while the following three months saw him allowed very limited exercise time. He describes how, in this second three month period, those precious 2 or 3 hours for exercise were totally at the whim of those guarding him, and the quality of that time was entirely dependent on the mood or disposition of the individual guards [T3:6-7].

He talks of the pyjamas he had to wear and the rags he had to use. His account is, as always, very factual but most readers will not be untouched by reading through the indignities heaped on a scholarly and peaceful man [T3:8]. What continually comes through, though, despite all Ali Bapir had to endure, is his dignity and adherence to his faith. One manifestation of that faith is Ali Bapir's insistence in calling adhan each day from the very beginning of his imprisonment, and it

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may well be that this practice formed the basis for his acceptance by the other inmates as a spiritual leader among them.

Contrary to International law, Ali Bapir was not allowed mail for the first seven months in Camp Cropper, despite his constant requests to the Americans for his letters. He expresses confusion as to why some former Ba'athist leaders were allowed mail while he was not and, indeed, this does appear to have been a deliberate act of specific discrimination against Ali Bapir [T3:13-16].

The Red Cross provided some assistance with this issue and Ali Bapir praises this organisation's humanity. His description of his conversations with individual Red Cross personnel provides further insight into Ali Bapir's own attitudes and courtesy towards others. Even with members of an overtly Christian organization, he takes the time and makes the effort to explain Islam, not to convert them but simply to explain and share ideas. He ends this part of the interview by sympathizing with the Red Cross because they were so frustrated in their attempts to help the prisoners by the intransigence of the American authorities [T3:16-19].

Following his explanation of the role of the Red Cross, Ali Bapir goes on to give his views on the conduct of the prison guards at Camp Cropper. He already referred to the moods of the individual guards being an important determinant to the quality of the day to day lives of the inmates and returns to that theme here in more detail. He differentiates between those who, acting under orders, treated them, if not well, at least in accordance with their instructions, and those who seemed to delight in tormenting the prisoners, verbally or in other small ways [T3:20].

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He recounts one of the first occasions when an American guard engaged him in conversation. The guard told Ali Bapir that he was upset because some of the other guards had told him that his wife had divorced him. Ali Bapir expresses his disgust at those guards who took such joy from hurting others and provides a number of further examples of the pettiness of several individuals who often acted outside of their instructions from their superiors [T3:20-21]. He remarks that the female guards tended to be kinder but, at the same time, expresses his shock at what he considers to be their lack of morality or modesty in dealing with their male colleagues [T3:21].

The issue of food is then explored and Ali Bapir tells of the difficulties he faced and the compromises he had to make in what he ate in order to maintain his health [T3:22].

He informs us that unlike a number of his fellow inmates, he was not punished for infractions of the rules very often. He puts this down to the fact that he is by nature a clean and orderly person, not given to confrontation. However, he was punished on three separate occasions: once for saying salaam, another for apparently walking too quickly for a guard's liking, and once for using a bar of soap that a guard said he should not [T3:22-23]. The last of these instances, he says, was because he did not understand the soldier, who only spoke English. He provides information on the punishment meted out to others, often for very minor reasons. He also explains the organization of the prison into divisions and outlines the routine and opportunities, though very limited, for interaction with other prisoners but confesses that the vast majority of his time was spent in his cell [T3:24].

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Health was clearly an issue for Ali Bapir, and in addition to his loss of weight, to which he refers earlier on in the interview, he states that he suffered from kidney stones that caused him very serious pain. Fortunately, he passed the stone but was denied access to a doctor about this specific condition [T3:25-27].

One of the most difficult aspects of prison life for someone such as Ali Bapir, who was so involved in the religious and political life of Kurdistan, was the lack of access to news from outside Camp Cropper. Any news that did filter through to him was from other inmates, and it was in this way that he learned of the demonstrations and petitions that had been organised to try to secure his release [T3:27].

At this point the interview returns to the nature of the treatment Ali Bapir had received, and he confirms that unlike those in Guantanamo and other prisons, he had never been forced to shave his beard, although his beard was pulled during torture and he was constantly derided for having facial hair [T3:29]. He expands on the psychological intimidation to which he was subjected, as well as detailing the physical discomfort he had to endure, especially when ill, and what he tells us of individual American guards' treatment does them little credit. A second very difficult aspect of life in prison was lack of contact with his family and he recounts how Allah, through dreams, enabled him to maintain a closeness to his wife and children [T3:31-33].

In the midst of what was a lengthy period of humiliation and physical and mental torture, lasting many months, Ali Bapir continues, whenever the occasion arises, to explain the tenets of Islam to his interrogators and his guards. He ex-

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plores ideas with them such as secularism, politics within Islam, and his support for a Kurdish state. He suggests that a number of his guards were not particularly well-educated and cautious about being seen to engage with him. However, some were curious, and he did what he could to provide answers to their questions. Often these questions were at a very personal level concerning issues of sexual relationships and the nature of Islamic family life [T3:34-35].

As in all his dealings, Ali Bapir bases his conduct towards his guards on Islamic principles, which required him to treat them with respect. He believed that some reciprocated and he also contends that many had sympathy with the predicament in which he had been unfairly placed. Ali Bapir indicates his gratitude to one particular guard who provided him with pen and paper to supplement the meagre official allocation [T3:36]. This was not an isolated incident, and what emerges is the fact that he managed to win the respect, and help, of a number of those guarding him through his own personality and calm demeanour. He was at an inevitable disadvantage in his engagements with his guards as he spoke very little English, and the guards had little or no Arabic. He often had to rely on others to translate for him but, nonetheless, did manage to communicate effectively.

The interview ends with further information on the physical aspects of the prison and insights into day to day life in the camp such as cigarette allocations. Taken as a whole, the interview provides a graphic, often upsetting, number of details of the conditions that Ali Bapir had to endure in his 22 months confinement. It is easy to admire, not for the first or the last time, his stoicism in the face of adversity.

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Topic 4

The fourth in this series of interviews takes place several weeks later, again at the Hawler Komal Television Studio, on 04/07/2005. This lengthy interview explores in detail the actual topics and questions put to Ali Bapir during his interrogations. These interrogations lasted over a 15 month period. Information is given on who conducted the sessions and Ali Bapir assesses the different interrogators and their questioning techniques.

He assumes that from information he subsequently received that the interrogators were members of the CIA, FBI and other military intelligence personnel, including British Intelligence. The interrogations were conducted in Arabic but the interrogators themselves usually spoke English with their questions being translated for them. Ali Bapir's answers were similarly translated back to them from Arabic to English. What is almost as interesting as what was said and done, and who was present, was what was not said or done. There was no legal representation and no independent verification of the translated questions or answers. Ali Bapir had no one to assist him, and the legality of such a process is questionable at best.

While numerous topics were covered, during sessions that could last up to 5 hours, Ali Bapir says there were four main areas of questioning upon which the interrogators focused. The first of these related to the IG's policy vis a vis the United States, with particular attention paid to the issue of whether Ali Bapir's group ever instigated, or contemplated, violence against American forces. The second focus was on the relationships of the IG with the Ba'athist regime. The third was the relationship between the IG and the Ansar group. The

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final main focus of questioning was on the links between the IG and Iran, although Ali Bapir says that towards the end of the interrogations that topic was dropped in favour of questions on his own personal position within the IG.

Ali Bapir contradicts the suggestions and claims that he had answered all questions in a written format and confirms that he had provided written responses to only a few questions in brief written responses amounting to no more than six pages on just two occasions [T4:4-5]. He is not able to say whether the Americans recorded, in writing, or by other means, his answers to the questions they posed. Given the wide-ranging nature of the four main topics explored, many related issues and matters emerged, and the interrogators asked Ali Bapir "thousands of questions" [T4:5].

To the best of his recollections, Ali Bapir indicates that the interrogations lasted up to ninety hours in total. During this time he repeated the position of the IG in relation to the American occupation of Iraq, his opposition to the Ba'athist regime, his attempts to persuade Ansar to desist from their policy of armed conflict, and denied that the IG was a puppet or tool of Iran [T4:7].

His denials are fulsome and backed up by factual information and evidence. His comments on all the main areas of questioning are direct and informative, and provide revealing insights into Ali Bapir's own thinking and the policies of the IG. Some of his answers repeat information given in the earlier three interviews but the vast bulk of the material provides new and valuable reflections.

A particularly noteworthy point, and one that Ali Bapir makes several times in the interviews, is that he repeatedly

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asked to be shown any evidence against him, or to meet any individual that had accused him of the charges laid against him. According to Ali Bapir, no evidence was ever produced to justify any investigation or, indeed, imprisonment. Even falsely manufactured documents that he was aware existed, purporting to show that he had had a close relationship with the Ba'athist regime, were not shown, he assumes, because the whole allegation had been debunked previously and the documentation proven to be false [T4:9].

Ali Bapir clearly finds the constant repetition of the same questions over and over particularly frustrating and admits that on one occasion he did lose his temper and refused to answer any further questions [T4:10]. He notes that the various interrogators seemed to have their own agendas and, consequently, there appeared to be little coordination in their questioning. This, Ali Bapir feels, contributed significantly to the constant re-questioning that he faced.

A section of the interview concentrates on the questions asked about other leading figures in the IG and other organisations. The interviewer is particularly interested in Kak Dilshad and Ali Bapir believes his answers convinced the Americans of his innocence in relation to claims that he supported Ansar and facilitated violence against the Americans [T4:12-13]. He is particularly vehement in his denial that he had, during his interrogation, provided the Americans with information that led to the arrest of Mamosta Mullah Ali Abdul-Aziz [T4:15].

Ali Bapir re-states that the consistency of his answers, which were all based on truth, ultimately led his interrogators to the conclusion that he was innocent of the charges

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brought against him. He expresses his opinion that some of these charges were the result of false information given to the Americans by individuals within Kurdistan, a fact that he very much regretted [T4:17].

The personality of each individual interrogator shaped the nature of the session and Ali Bapir compares the styles of the American and British officials who questioned him. In many cases during the interrogations, he was able to expand at some length on his interpretation of Islam, and the politics of the region. Once again, he use quotations from the Quran to justify his stance on a number of issues, including the use of violence, the nature of fundamentalism, its origins, democracy, and his concept of Islamic law. This section is particularly important for anyone who wishes to understand Ali Bapir's core convictions [T4:18-22].

He agrees with the interviewer that, on occasion, mainly in the latter stages, the interrogations had turned more into an intellectual dialogue that explored numerous basic issues, from sexual morality to political ideology, and he recounts that his interrogators often said how much they enjoyed engaging in debate with him [T4:23]. Ali Bapir expresses his view that he did help to counter many misconceptions that his captors had about Islamic teaching and Muslims in general. He tells us that they were often surprised when he explained aspects of Islam, and one even indicated that he intended to study Islamic theology in more detail following their conversations [T4:25]. Ali Bapir's assessment, in general, is that most of the interrogators were limited by their lack of knowledge of their own culture and history, let alone that of Islam, in their attempts to fully understand many of the clarifications and explanations he gave.

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The interviewer then briefly asks about physical torture and brutality, although this topic is covered more fully in a later interview [Topic 5]. At this stage, the interviewer concentrates on psychological tactics. Ali Bapir uses this section to expand on his concept of a God that is involved in everyone's daily life, a concept that was alien to the thinking of his interrogators. He provides information on the interview techniques employed on him and is scathing of the skills and abilities of the U.S. Intelligence Service [T4:27-30].

The final part of the interview explores the features of the actual interrogation room, and in an aside Ali Bapir refers to being questioned about a remark he made about George Bush, comparing him to a Pharaoh. He justifies his comment and refuses to back away from it. Similarly, he says he refused to alter his view that America was an occupying power [T4:31].

Ali Bapir assesses the impact of his responses on his interrogators and acknowledges that his constant, consistent, repetition of his answers to the same questions exasperated some, but he re-iterates his contention that it was this consistency that ultimately convinced them of the truthfulness of his answers. A major concession from several officials was that his arrest had been a mistake [T4:38].

Topic 5

The fifth in this series of interviews takes place at the Hawler Komal Television Studio, and is the second session held on 03/07/2005. This section concentrates very specifically on the issue of the degree of ill-treatment that Ali Bapir faced during his time at Camp Cropper. The issue of whether that ill-treatment constituted torture is worthy of further exploration.

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The basic definition of 'torture' found in the Oxford Dictionary is:

"the action or practice of inflicting severe pain on someone as a punishment or in order to force them to do or say something".

Article 1 of the United Nations 'Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment' is, however, the internationally agreed definition of torture:

"the term "torture" means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions." (1)

Whatever definition is used, it is absolutely certain that the suffering that Ali Bapir recounts falls into the category of state sanctioned torture. What makes the situation even worse is that the officials involved in these practices were officers of a government that claims to uphold the values of law and order, human rights, and the sanctity of due process.

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(1) Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx

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As already indicated from previous interview sessions, a significant issue that does not arise overtly from the various interviews given by Ali Bapir is the fact that he was never formally charged, never given access to legal advice, or given the opportunity to have his case represented in a court of law by an appropriate advocate. That, in itself, is both reprehensible and suspicious.

Ali Bapir answers the questions put to him about his treatment in a dispassionate, balanced and detached manner, never resorting to the hyperbole that might be expected of someone who had been in his position. He starts by making the very valid point that in his opinion the psychological aspects of the torture he suffered were more damaging than the physical ones [T5:1]. The deprivation of senses, a matter specifically referred to in the U.N. Convention, including being blindfolded, deprived of sleep, and sunlight all had very negative impacts on his psychological well-being. However, he states that his captors were not slow to inflict pain as and when they chose, whether through excessively tight binding of arms and legs, pulling of hair, and through insisting that he stand upright for hours at a time while being questioned, as well as actual beatings [T5:2-3].

Ali Bapir tells us of occasions where, to increase his discomfort while being made to stand, a bottle or container of water was placed on his head; if a bottle was not available then another heavy item was used instead. He remembers that even relief from standing from those long hours was painful as he was made to kneel on a hard concrete floor, resting on his elbows [T5:2]. In addition to sleep deprivation, bright lights were shone into his eyes, and throughout lengthy periods he states he was deprived of food and, more importantly, water.

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It should be noted that most of these interrogation sessions took place at the height of summer, when temperatures were extremely high, making the need for water even more of an absolute imperative. It is little surprise, then, that Ali Bapir describes being exhausted, "dehydrated and thoroughly worn out" [T5:2]. His pain was "excruciating" and he remembers praying to Allah to send him the blessing of unconsciousness [T5:2]. However, Ali Bapir did not pass out so had to endure the misery and pain and to cope prayed constantly or recited verses from the Quran [T5:2-3]. His description of being pulled to his feet by his beard when he collapsed in exhaustion is harrowing, and the reader might well ask themselves how any human being with a modicum of compassion could place heavy items onto the chest of an exhausted man, pour water over his nose, not his mouth, and so systematically inflict pain over such prolonged periods of time.

Of all the abuses, Ali Bapir singles out the heat that he had to bear during interrogations coupled with what he describes as "the unbearable loud drum music" that his interrogators played [T5:3-5]. For much of the time he was blindfolded but does tell of one occasion when a dancer performed before him while insults were thrown at him in Kurdish [T5:3].

Throughout the physical abuse, being slammed "to the ground" or being punched [T5:4, 16], Ali Bapir says he was constantly being told that he was a liar. At the end of one 9-day period he recounts how his whole body was bruised, skin had peeled from his nose and forehead, and he had scars all over his face [T5:4]. His condition became so bad that a doctor was sent for, who confirmed the seriousness of his state and expressed surprise that he had not actually died [T5:5].

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Ali Bapir confirms that he was never subjected to electrical shocks or abused by the use of instruments of torture, as others had been, but the severity of the kicking, beatings, broken bones and psychological sufferings were still immense for him. All of this torture was carried out in secret and in isolation. He believes there were no other witnesses, although he does recall fellow inmates being brought to see the state he was in as a warning to them. As to who actually carried out the assaults, Ali Bapir sates that he is uncertain. He remembers individuals dressed in civilian clothes, with armed uniformed guards also in the room. His overall feeling was that those conducting the interrogations knew how to inflict pain [T5:6-7]. He tells us that even in the midst of the most dreadful suffering, when he longed for death, through recitation of the Quran he achieved, on occasion, a calmness and peace that enabled him to survive [T5:7].

During his second period of extended interrogation, very quickly undertaken after the ending of the first intensive session, Ali Bapir says he was again subjected to sleep deprivation and made to stand adjacent to a barbed wire fence, so that if he fell he would injure himself. He was also deprived of water again. When the interrogators eventually relented, they only gave him enough to wet his lips [T5:8].

Throughout this process Ali Bapir says he was questioned relentlessly and states how strongly he continued to maintain his innocence. With obvious, and justified, personal pride, he is able to answer negatively when asked if he ever said anything under torture that he later regretted [T5:9].

Unlike other prisoners, he tells us that he was never stripped naked, nor were there any instances when the Quran had been disrespected, as has been reported happening at

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Guantanamo. He makes the point that others in Camp Cropper were threatened with castration, had their fingernails and toenails taken out but this had not happened to him [T5:10] Ali Bapir recounts his tale, horrific enough as it is, without any embellishments, as always he speaks only the truth and states exactly, as far as he is concerned, what happened; no more, no less.

Ali Bapir states his personal belief that he was only subjected to as much torture as Allah judged he could cope with. He explores with the interviewer the parts played by racism and religious hatred in the individual actions of specific guards and concludes that despite the pain and humiliation he never once wavered in his faith and the ultimate goodness of Allah [T5:11].

The interviewer detects a certain reticence on the part of Ali Bapir to go into a great level of detail about what he experienced, with Ali Bapir confirming that he finds it very difficult to recount all the details as it brings back painful memories [T5:16-17].

Significantly, he steadfastly refuses to condemn all Americans for his treatment and expresses the view that there are good and bad people in all nations, and says he believes many of his interrogators had no personal hatred of him or his faith, but saw themselves as simply doing their duty. Such magnanimity is typical of Ali Bapir throughout all these interview sessions and as readers, is interesting to speculate whether we could maintain such a position in the face of similar treatment. The details of torture inflicted on fellow prisoners is harrowing and the whole interview transcript makes for very distressing reading. Nonetheless, it is vital that as many people as possible are aware of Ali Bapir's per-

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sonal witness account of what happened in Camp Cropper and come to their own conclusions as to the actions carried out by the emissaries of all the countries involved, most notably the United States.

To summarize the legal points relating to whether actions taken by individuals can be construed as torture, the U.N. provided clarification of Article 1 of the Convention against Torture. It identified three cumulative elements that had to be present for actions to be classified as torture. The first was that there had to be intentional infliction of severe mental or physical suffering. There is ample evidence during this interview section [T5:1-20] that Ali Bapir suffered both. The second element is that the action has to be carried out by a public official. There seems to be no dispute that what Ali Bapir describes was carried out by American guards and by interrogators working on the instructions of their military commanders and government. The third determining factor is that there has to be a specific purpose behind the use of these methods. In the case of Ali Bapir, the intention was to force him to confess to crimes and violence that he had not committed, agree that he had supported and facilitated acts of violence perpetrated by others against American forces, and had worked in co-operation with the Ba'athist regime and Iran to carry out illegal acts.

Some jurists have queried what exactly is meant by pain or suffering arising only from interrogations, as opposed to the use of implements designed to inflict pain and the legal status of lawful sanctions in particular in relation to corporal punishment. For the avoidance of doubt, the U.N. further clarified that corporal punishment of any kind is prohibited under international law in general, and under the Con-

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vention against Torture in particular. Based on these rulings, what Ali Bapir describes as having endured throughout his detention must be categorized as torture. To re-enforce this point, it is worth referring to the Tokyo Declaration, 1975 which stated that torture was

"the deliberate, systematic or wanton infliction of physical or mental suffering by one or more persons acting alone or on the orders of any authority, to force another person to yield information, to make a confession, or for any other reason". (1)

The reader will, no doubt, make up his or her own mind about the degree of torture to which Ali Bapir was subjected. Based on what he tells us though, no one could be blamed for being touched by what he had to endure, all made even worse by the fact that he was an innocent man who had been deprived of even the most basic of legal human rights to a fair hearing.

Topic 6

In this sixth interview, given on 02/03/2005 at the Hawler Komal Television Studio, Ali Bapir turns his attention to his fellow inmates during his twenty-two months of imprisonment. He begins by stating categorically that none of those he met in prison were friends, although in the course of their

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(1) World Medical Association (1975) 'WMA Declaration of Tokyo – Guidelines for Physicians Concerning Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in Relation to Detention and Imprisonment' [Online]. Available at https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-tokyo-guidelines-for-physicians-concerning-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading-treatment-or-punishment-in-relation-to-detention-and-imprisonment/

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imprisonment he did reach out to all those who he deemed to be in need of spiritual guidance, even those that prior to his incarceration he would have classified as political enemies. In many ways, this section is the core of the book as it provides so much information about the views of the Ba'athist party in contrast to Ali Bapir's views.

Ali Bapir identifies a number of individuals, including high ranking Ba'athist officials, that were held at the same time as him in Camp Cropper, the most well-known being Saddam Hussein [T6:2]. He says that he did not actually ever meet the former President of Iraq but did see him on occasion being taken to and from interrogations and gives his view on his demeanor. Indeed, from the information Ali Bapir provides, it is apparent that none of the prisoners had any access to Saddam Hussein and that he was kept separate from the other prisoners at all times [T6:3-5].

In his account of who else was in the prison, Ali Bapir confirms, as far as he is aware, that no other Kurds were imprisoned in the camp. He makes the point several times that the opportunities to talk with other prisoners were mostly dependent on the whims of the individual guards initially but goes on to name various Ba'athist officials that he did spend time with when he was finally allowed to engage with other prisoners. During discussions with these Ba'athists, Ali Bapir says he was very clear in giving his opinion of the regime they had served. He says he did not countenance their attempts to ingratiate themselves with him, nor agree with them that their common enemy was the United States. He places the blame for Iraq's predicament firmly on the shoulders of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist party. However, he notes that over time "their tone" with him "became notice-

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ably conciliatory" and they treated him with respect, while also expressing surprise at his imprisonment [T6:8]. There is a particularly interesting section of interview, where Ali Bapir comments on Ba'athist views of him as the leader of the IG and it becomes evident that they regarded him prior to his arrest as a "dangerous enemy" [T6:9].

As opportunities to discuss matters became more frequent and less dependent on the goodwill of the prison personnel, Ali Bapir suggests that perceptions of him altered and the nature and depth of discussions between him and Ba'athist party members changed. He states he continued, when appropriate, to press his views on the illegitimacy of actions taken by the Ba'athists while in power, and he also started to offer them his advice. Initially, this advice centres on what Ali Bapir considers to be the Ba'athist's totally un-Islamic idolization of Saddam Hussein. From there he branches out into other concepts based on his understanding and appreciation of the Quran. He admits that to begin with these discussions could be heated, and Ali Bapir forgives their initial intransigence, putting it down to their lack of "foundation" [T6:11]. He contrasts their lack of a basis for their reverence for one man with his beliefs based exclusively on the teaching of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

As might be expected, the Ba'athists put forward their own views and suggested that much of Ali Bapir's criticisms were unjustified and exaggerated. One particular point of contention was whether the Ba'athists were Muslim, as they claimed, or not, as Ali Bapir contended. This debate brings in a whole variety of concepts and ideas, including that of ummah and the nature of a religion as opposed to a political ideology [T6:11-12].

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These discussions, we learn, took place over periods of up to three hours, either in cells or after exercise, and many centred on what was clearly a key issue for all; whether Ba'athists could ever be considered Muslim. Ali Bapir admits that the majority did pray, to a greater or lesser extent, but he had to help them to pray properly [T6:13]. From his perspective, no matter what they stated, these Ba'athists were not Muslims because they did not understand what being Islamic actually meant. The result was that he spent more and more time explaining and clarifying points of Islamic ideology, and recounts that it was his success in explaining Islam to them that finally resulted in many realizing the inherent contradiction between being a member of the Ba'athist party and being a Muslim. Having made this breakthrough with some members of the Ba'athist party, Ali Bapir goes on to relate how he then really begins his "instruction of them" [T6:14].

He relates some of the examples from the Quran that he used in his strategy to help those whom he guided to a better understanding of the religion to which they professed adherence. In doing so he provides significant guidance for readers on the nature of Islam as a way to live, which he feels is superior to the alternatives of secularism, capitalism and globalization. For Ali Bapir, many of the Ba'athists held extremely simplistic notions of what constituted religion and his exposition of what the term actually means provide detailed explanations of the fundamental aspects of true Islamic belief [T6:14-16].

The interviewer interrupts at this stage to explore the degree to which Ba'athist actions were based on ignorance and, if that was the case, whether that excused them of their crimes against Islam. Ali Bapir's response is typically meas-

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ured, with him stating his belief that the Ba'athists he encountered in prison were ignorant of Islam, a fact many of them, he believes, came to acknowledge themselves. He continues, however, to condemn their actions and provides explanations for his rejection of the idea that they could not be held accountable for what they had done. Ali Bapir does not accept any claim by the Ba'athists that they were acting in the interests of Islam and cites a number of un-Islamic activities and actions, using references from the Quran to prove his points [T6:13-24].

The interview then returns to an exploration of Ali Bapir's conversations with groups and individuals. There is a particularly illuminating section in which he expands on discussions he had with Ali Hassan Al-Majid, who is popularly known as "Chemical Ali" [T6:25]. We learn that it was Ali Hassan Al-Majid that brought Ali Bapir news of the demonstrations organized to press for his release. For most of Ali Hassan Al-Majid's imprisonment, he was housed in the same division as Ali Bapir, only two cells along the corridor. He was not allowed to exercise with the other six members of the division and so Ali Bapir agreed to chat to him through a window in his cell. Ai Bapir outlines the nature of the conversations they conducted and is very fair in outlining Ali Hassan Al-Majid's political views, even though he fundamentally disagrees with him [T6:25-27].

Ali Bapir expresses some surprise at his stance and quizzes him on why he did not express those views to Saddam Hussein. Ali Hassan Al-Majid's reply is that he did but did not have the influence of officials such as Tariq Aziz. He also vehemently denied that he had any involvement in chemical warfare and pointed to Nizar Khazraji as the real instiga-

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tor. Ali Bapir records that Ali Hassan Al-Majid went on to express the view that Saddam Hussein may not have been aware of the initial use of chemical weapons and tells of him castigating Khazraji for his actions [T6:27].

Ali Bapir is quick to pick up on inconsistencies though, and says he questioned that if Khazraji had been responsible, and Saddam Hussein knew that, why did the Ba'athists blamed Iran? Later on, he quite openly tells Ali Hassan Al-Majid that he does not believe his version of events and questions his assertion that he had little or no influence over Saddam Hussein [T6:28]. Ali Bapir then tells us that other Ba'athist leaders admitted to him later that Ali Hassan Al-Majid had been highly influential and had been the one to organize and authorise the use of those outlawed weapons. Despite being so directly confronted, "Chemical Ali" continued to protest his innocence [T6:29].

Questions turn to the other Ba'athist leaders and Ali Bapir's assessment of their abilities and qualifications. His assessments are to the point and provide a damming indictment of their level of political acumen, which he considered to be as inadequate as their understanding of Islam. From what he tells us, these former high-ranking officials were distressed and surprised by Ali Bapir's low opinion of them. He put their promotion within the Ba'athist regime down to currying favour with Saddam Hussein as their levels of education and skills were so low that many could not even speak or write Arabic correctly. He does concede that some were educated, but says they were the ones that complained the most loudly about how little they had been listened to [T6:30]. Ali Bapir reveals some sympathy with their claims and suggests that it was Saddam Hussein's own sons who exerted the most

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influence on their father. His overall assessment is that leaders of the Ba'athist party were totally incompetent.

Unsurprisingly, Ali Bapir had a number of conversations with Ba'athist leaders about the issue of Kurdistan. Indeed, he tells us that in these discussion he made the point as forcefully as he was able that references to Kurdistan as 'Northern Iraq', a term they consistently used, was highly offensive [T6:31]. He also laid out his position and provides the rationale for an independent Kurdistan. He remarks that a number of those debates were very heated, and in them the Ba'athists expressed their dislike of Ali Bapir's "fervent Kurdish nationalism" [T6:32]. He, in turn, takes great pains to explain that his life's work on behalf of his own people, and his desire for a homeland for the Kurdish people, in no way implied any lack of respect or hatred of any other group. In defence of his position, he provides some very detailed information about Kurdish politics and various Kurdish leaders that gives numerous insights into a complex political situation, and a study of this section, in particular, is especially important for any reader interested in the roles of the various individuals and groups involved in this regions and the inter-relationships between them all [T6:33].

Of particular note is his assessment as to why the Kurdish Revolution, known as the Aylul Revolution (1961-70), and their attempts to win independence in the 1980s and 1990s failed. His conclusion is that the Kurdish leadership was wrong in its decisions to look to the U.S. and Israel to support its cause, and he returns to a theme developed earlier in the interview, that the U.S. only ever acts in its own interests [T6:35].

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He admits that he was never able to convince any of the Ba'athists of the legitimacy of the Kurdish cause. Other prisoners, however, did express sympathy with his views, and Ali Bapir says that with them he was able to point to parts of the Quran that he felt supported his conviction that specific groups had a God-given right to self-rule and nationhood [T6:37-38].

The interviewer reverts back at this point to ask for further details about Ali Hassan Al-Majid and the nature of Ali Bapir's relationship with him. In the course of this section, Ali Bapir explains his willingness to engage with someone with such a shameful reputation and refers to the Quran for the basis of his actions. His major point is that Islam is a religion of mercy and that his decision to engage with Ali Hassan Al-Majid was based on sound Islamic principles. He stresses, however, that in doing so, this in no way implies that he forgot the horrors for which 'Chemical Ali' had been responsible [T6:40-41].

Ali Bapir goes on to differentiate how individuals act while in positions of power and how they act when powerless, as was the situation in prison. He makes the point that it is actions undertaken when in power that tells more about an individual then those characteristics displayed when helpless. In the end, Ali Bapir does not waver in his conclusion that Ali Hassan Al-Majid was guilty of many of the crimes attributed to him. His view was shared by those who tried him - Ali Hassan Al-Majid was sentenced to death and hanged in January, 2010.

With regards to other Ba'athist leaders, Ali Bapir says that despite heated arguments with them, he never felt any personal threat, a situation that he puts down to the fact that

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they were in prison rather than anything else. As relationships developed, he more and more took on the role of religious advisor, and he mentions that the Red Cross visitors were perplexed by his magnanimity towards his former enemies, which he once again explains as being based on his Islamic faith.

It is clear from what Ali Bapir tells us that a significant number of the Ba'athist officials continued to believe that their actions while in office, and their beliefs in general, were totally valid, including their treatment of the Kurds. Ali Bapir says he took every opportunity to express the contrary view [T6:46-47].

Having explored Ba'athist views on political issues, the interviewer at this stage returns, once again, to Ali Hassan Al-Majid and his role in the invasion of Kuwait, but then quickly switches to try and ascertain Ali Bapir's opinions on Saddam Hussein as a political leader. While Ali Bapir admits that he was glad that Saddam Hussein the politician was brought low, and deserved to be punished for the injustices wrought by the Ba'athist party, he still had a degree of sympathy for an ostensible Muslim being "imprisoned by infidels" [T6:49].

He makes it very clear that he totally condemns all of Saddam Hussein's actions, and blames him for the American invasion of a Muslim country, but also expresses the view that a number of western powers were complaint in those crimes and that Saddam could not, of would not, have carried out so many of his atrocities if he had no had at least the implicit backing of those powers, and in particular the United States. Ali Bapir also describes how the bodies of Saddam's sons were brought to Camp Cropper and his account

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includes the reactions of the Ba'athists to the death of the two men [T6:50].

Following that brief detour, he goes on to explain how Doctor Abdulmunim, a fellow prisoner, encouraged him to take on the leadership role in prayers for the prisoners, despite the fact that he himself was an eminent expert in Sharia law who had memorized the Quran. The Doctor, Ali Bapir tells us, often supported his explanations of Islamic teaching [T6:51].

In another change of direction, the interviewer returns to Ba'athist policies prior to 1991 and the relationship of the regime with the United States. Ali Bapir explains that America's support for the regime ended because the Ba'athists refused to give up their support for the Palestinians or their opposition to Israel [T6:52].

Inevitably, a considerable part of the interview is taken up by Ali Bapir's assessment of why the Ba'athist regime ultimately failed militarily. Interspersed with his own thoughts are the views of the Ba'athist officials on this issue, as expressed to Ali Bapir in their numerous conversations. The Ba'athist assessment of their failure to defeat the Americans is that they underestimated the likelihood of the U.S. actually embarking on a military venture. Consequently, they were not as prepared as they should have been for such an eventuality. Some felt that the military resources they did have were not well deployed or utilized. According to Ali Bapir, the Ba'athist officials vehemently denied claims that many Iraqi troops had mutinied when the invasion began, and argued that American attacks had been unexpectedly vicious, killing so many, so quickly, that the army became demoralised[T6:56].

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The interview turns back at this point to Saddam Hussein, his relationship with his sons, and his immediate entourage. Ali Bapir provides information gleaned from the Ba'athist prisoners about various plots against Saddam Hussein and how he dealt with them. All this provides further fascinating insights into such a brutal dictatorship [T6:57].

In the final part of the interview, Ali Bapir recounts rows and squabbles between Ba'athists in prison and how the Americans used some against others, always encouraging them to inform on one another. All of this, he says, led to a generally despondent atmosphere between them. More and more came to talk to him about their concerns, their fears, and about religion. His answers to the questions they asked him provide more information about Ali Bapir's own convictions. The centrality of his belief and those that come across in all his answers is the need to act with kindness at all times, to live according to the precepts laid out in the Quran, and the need to actively practise the Islamic faith [T6:59].

Ali Bapir's religious leadership, gradually assumed and accepted over time by his fellow prisoners, enabled him to introduce many to concepts and interpretations of Islam to which they had never previously been exposed. One very important tenet of his faith in relation to forgiveness is explored in the later part of the interview; Ali Bapir makes the point very forcefully that he did not, as some reported, "forgive" his Ba'athist fellow inmates. For him, forgiveness is the prerogative of Allah. His point to the Ba'athists is that if their repentance for any past wrongdoings was genuine, they would make amends and Allah might then forgive them their failings. Indeed, he goes on to explore the whole concept of repentance and differentiates between repentance, forgiveness, atonement and retribution [T6:65].

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In response to the specific question, Ali Bapir expresses his view that none of the Ba'athists, even Saddam Hussein, would be executed. In that judgment he was proved wrong, and he did state at the time that he might be proven to be mistaken if the Americans concluded their interests would be better served by executions. He expresses the view that many of the prisoners did deserve to face the ultimate penalty for their crimes but the final decision would not be based on justice or law, but political expediency. In that, he was proved to be correct [T6:72].

The very last section of this interview session in general deals with far less extreme matters, such as smoking, food, sending and receiving communications from outside the prison, the topics he covered in his sermons, and how Eid was celebrated [T6:75].

In summary, this particular interview session, Topic 6, is undoubtedly disjointed by the interviewer's tendency to jump back to issues and to individuals already discussed earlier in the session, and does not flow in the way that a more contrived dialogue would. However, its value lies in that very authenticity, and reading the transcript repays the effort that has to be put in to following some very deep and intense arguments and concepts. For this reason, a close reading of the transcript is highly recommended.

Topic 7

The seventh interview took place a few months later, on 10/07/2005, again at the Hawler Komal Television Studio. In this discussion the interviewer concentrates on finding out from Ali Bapir how he spent his time while in prison. He sets the scene by making the point that prior to his arrest Ali Bapir had been an extremely busy man and had spent much

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of his time reading and writing for a variety of purposes. In earlier interviews, the interview recalls Ali Bapir referring to spending time taking exercise and, when permitted to do so, reading and writing, but is now interested, here in Topic 7, in the details and specifics of Ali Bapir's daily routine.

Ali Bapir confirms that to an extent much of his time while in prison was spent in much the same way as before his imprisonment. For him, time spent thinking, reading the Quran, praying, and writing are core activities, no matter what situation he finds himself in, but he tells us that being in prison made those activities much harder. He recalls that in the early days of his captivity he found himself unable to "think, read or write" and that being in solitary confinement created a vacuum, especially since at that time he was not provided with a copy of the Quran [T7:1]. He tells us that a fellow prisoner gave him one, in an English translation, and after a further 2 months all prisoners were given a copy. He reveals that for the next several months the only material he had to read was the Quran and he read that avidly, often reading the whole book in one day, and at least 140 times in total but as conditions improved and other reading material was made available, he spent less time on the Quran. Ali Bapir makes reading the Quran into a prayer, something from which he derived real pleasure and spiritual support [T7:2].

The interviewer wishes to probe the whole issue of worship, other than reading the Quran, and is particularly interested in how Ali Bapir dealt with fasting but Ali Bapir replies that he wants to deal with issues in an order and so outlines his basic daily routine from rising until evening frits. Within this outline he tells us when he prayed, read, ate and exercised. He also explains concepts of forgiveness, the will of Allah, and his uniqueness [T7:3].

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He remembers that he often walked as he prayed, during the exercise times when he was allowed. Those times constantly changed and Ali Bapir speculates as to the reasons behind the different times when prisoner were allowed outside and when they were allowed to converse with other prisoners [T7:3-5].

When a greater range of reading material did become more available, Ali Bapir says he started studying the Surahs. His many hours reading, and re-reading, the Quran and the Surahs, which led to him delving deeper and deeper into the meanings held in their pages. Once he had the materials to write, he was able to out his thoughts down on paper [T7:5].

The interviewer returns to the issue of fasting and Ali Bapir provides information on his fasting regime, which was intense. He calculates that over half of his total time in prison was spent in fasting. He also gives details of the arrangements in prison for meals [T7:6]. The issue of toilet facilities and washing is dealt with in a matter of fact way but the distress the inadequate arrangements caused Ali Bapir is obvious. It also emerges during the course of the interview that Ali Bapir's sleep pattern was generally disrupted for one reason or another but he states that he generally had between 5 and 7 hours sleep each night [T7:7-8].

A large section of the interview then focuses on Ali Bapir's personal worship and the extent to which prison was, or was not, a spiritual experience for him. His account of his spiritual regime and experiences, in particular how he recharged his spirituality, is a key part of his story. His conclusions about so many aspects of Allah, based on his contemplations of Islamic belief, provide us with insight into some of the deepest theological concepts of his faith. What is

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revealing is that he related these very deep concepts to everyday practical matters and how to deal with others on day to day basis [T7:8-12].

The interviewer explores with Ali Bapir the impact of solitary confinement and he is very positive about some aspects of what would generally be regarded as harsh treatment. He goes on to explain the process and timings of his gradual access to further readings and identifies an eclectic range of books that he read, from classic novels to Islamic treatises. With the support of British Intelligence Officers, he was provided with writing materials and was able to commence compiling his thoughts in the form of a book. He acknowledges that help, and that of guards who also gave him materials beyond his allocation, and at their own expense. Ali Bapir also explains how he safeguarded his work, which contained the "holy names of Allah", from desecration, ensuring it remained untainted or safe from being destroyed [T7:13-17].

Ali Bapir analyses the impact of his book, Islam Manifests in the Book of Allah, on his fellow inmates, especially the Ba'athists. He explains the format of the book and briefly summarizes each of its four chapters, dealing with Creation, the Day of Judgment, Sharia, and Islam as a guide to life [T7:18]. In exploring these matters, Ali Bapir says he found a degree of tranquility and, in fact, prison proved to be an aid to his motivation and the creation of a sense of inner peace. This personal tranquility enables him to explore a whole range of issues raised in the Quran. He takes a number of excerpts from the Quran directly, and almost thinks aloud about the meaning of each. Once again the reader is given an insight into Ali Bapir's philosophy and his attitudes to others [T7:21-22].

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He acknowledges that the time in prison enabled him to achieve a clearer and deeper understanding of many aspects of his faith, far more than he would have achieved without the experience of the deprivation of personal liberty. Throughout his imprisonment, prayer remained central to his being and he returns to the theme of the importance of prayer in the latter parts of the interview. He makes the point that lack of access to other written sources was never, in fact, a major issue for him since the Quran provided all he needs [T7:26].

He is not particularly complimentary about some of the Western classics he read, and is particularly dubious about the worth of Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. He reaches the conclusion that many of the Western books he read justified an immorality that he could condone. He had some praise for Shakespeare but, in general, found most Western writing unappealing. Although his criticism is not reserved for Western literature alone; he also raises doubts about aspects of The Preachers of the Sultans, but is clear about the rationale for his criticism [T7:27].

The interview as a whole provides a range of additional thoughts on many Islamic principles and practices, as well as further insights into the thinking of Ali Bapir the man and religious leader.

Topic 8

The eighth interview follows on from the seventh, also taking place on 10/07/2005 at the Hawler Komal Television Studio, and expands on how Ali Bapir spent his time during his months of imprisonment. In this short discussion, the interviewer concentrates on any special or significant events that occurred in Camp Cropper during Ali Bapir's time there.

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Right from the start, Ali Bair makes it clear that he will not go into too much detail about some incidents as they are too personal to relate in full. However, he does tell us a considerable amount about his own response to his imprisonment and his calmness during periods of real adversity [T8:1].

He quotes a number of verses from the Quran that he says helped him to maintain his equilibrium, verses that were relevant to his situation and which he believes would help anyone who finds themselves in difficulty [T8:2-4].

He recounts his spiritual growth in this period and tells us about some of the dreams, he believed were sent by Allah, to guide him through his trials and re-affirms his absolute conviction in the power of prayer [T8:5].

In his response to specific questions about events and incidents, he relates the punishments to which he was subjected, and his reaction to those cruelties. He also reminds us of his initial engagement with the Ba'athists on the issue of whether or not they could legitimately claim to be Muslim and, once again, points out their lack of any true understanding, as far as he is concerned, of the basic tenets of Islam [T8:6-8].

During this session, Ali Bapir also expresses the opinion that there were some times that were actually "good" during his time in Camp Cropper. Within this category he includes his discussions with the American and British interrogators after formal interrogation sessions had ended. He feels pleased that those with whom he conversed expressed satisfaction at being introduced to "the beautiful aspects of Islam" [T8:9].

He is understandably proud of what he saw as the positive impact he had on the Ba'athist prisoners and acknowl-

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edges the support that the writings of Islamic scholars, who had also suffered imprisonment, provided him in his hour of need [T8:9-10].

Although a short session compared to the other interviews, the specific focus on his own spiritual development is illuminating.

Topic 9

The ninth, and final, interview with Ali Bapir was held on the same day as T7 and T8 at the Hawler Komal Television Studio. This lengthy session concentrates on the circumstances surrounding the ending of his imprisonment and includes reflections on the timing of his actual release.

Ali Bapir repeats that there was never any evidence against him to justify his incarceration and confirms that the Americans acknowledged this fact and apologised to him while he was still in Camp Cropper [T9:1]. The Americans working in the prison put down the delay in his release to decisions taken by more senior officials who feared him for whatever reasons of their own. He describes in some detail the day he learnt that he was to be released and the process involved in the days leading up to his detention finally ending.

It is worth pointing out that throughout his account, Ali Bapir invariably refers to his release or discharge; he never refers to being granted his 'freedom' because, as he says, from his perspective, he was always free despite being locked up in a prison [T9:2].

He tells us that he insisted on being released wearing his Kurdish clothes. He also outlines the discussions he had with

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his captors about the terms of his release, and the documents that he refused to sign. Part of the initial conditions included signing a statement admitting that he had supported the Ba'athists but Ali Bapir is adamant and said he told them clearly that he would rather be returned to his cell than confess to something that was not true [T9:3]. He also says he refused to accept as a condition of his release that he would co-operate with the Americans but, instead, repeated that he was owed an apology from them for wrongful imprisonment. Even fellow inmates urged him to sign the document to ensure he could leave but Ali Bapir states he would not compromise his principles or integrity [T9:4-5].

He tells us that he was returned to a holding cell for 24 hours and during that time he let his gaolers know that all he would sign was a document that stated his determination to promise to serve his country. A document along those lines was finally drafted with the caveat that Ali Bapir was agreeing to nothing that ran contrary to Islamic law. Eventually, an exasperated group of officials agreed to his terms and he tells us he was taken straight from Camp Cropper to Baghdad. Ali Bapir describes his final hours in the prison, the farewells and the congratulations offered by so many, including the guards. The affection in which he was held is apparent in the remarks made by his erstwhile captors [T9:6].

The interviewer then turns to exploring Ali Bapir's assessment of why he was released at that time. Ali Bapir outlines his thoughts on that matter and gives a great deal of credit to those who had campaigned for so long on his behalf [T9:7].

He goes on to re-iterate his opinion of the U.S. and its involvement in Iraq, an opinion that remains unchanged despite the treatment he received at the hands of American

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officials. He maintains his view that far being the guardians of human rights and democracy, the U.S. only ever acts in its own interests. He re-states his views on the nature of the American invasion of Iraq and its continued presence in the country [T9:8].

Ali Bapir is, however, no fanatic and he questions the motives of those who advocate removing the Americans without having a clear strategy as to what would replace them. He returns to the theme of when violence can, and cannot, be justified and stresses that all political actions have to be taken in the context of adherence to Islamic law. He ties in his stated position with the decision of the IG not to take part in any military opposition to the U.S. and rejects the aspirations of those fighting to establish an Islamic state through violence [T9:9-11].

Ali Bapir touched on the whole concept of terror as a political weapon in an earlier interview but now returns to it here and explores the concept in more depth. His argument is cogent and succinct, and highlights the illogicalities of the American depiction of terrorism [T9:12].

The interviewer presses him on the value of publicizing his own suffering while in prison. He responds by saying that all those who have suffered unjustly at the hands of the U.S. should expose American hypocrisy [T9:13].

He reminds us that he has acknowledged some positive benefits from his imprisonment but unequivocally condemns the illegal use of imprisonment for political purposes. He urges all people of goodwill to come together to agree on how disputes should be resolved in ways that do not contravene human rights, and argues that the U.S. should not

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be allowed to be the arbiter of justice in the modern world [T9:14-15].

Following the interviewer's prompting, Ali Bapir then expands on his views on how Muslims should respond to the U.S., and in particular, how Kurds should treat America. He expresses some very forthright views about those Kurds that had tied their flag to the American mast. He differentiates between the American state, which he believes is obsessed with power, and individual Americans who he believes have the same capacity for good and bad as any others, and refers to the acts of kindness he benefitted from at the hands of some of his guards [T9:16].

Ali Bapir has one very strong message for the American public which is that in a democracy it is the people that ultimately must accept responsibility for the actions of its leaders, and it is the people that must, if they disapprove of those actions, take whatever steps necessary to change those in power [T9:17].

The next part of this interview finds Ali Bapir reflecting on what he learned while in prison and picks out coming to the realisation that having a direct relationship with Allah enables anyone to overcome all the trials and tribulations sent as being the most important learning experience he had [T9:18].

The interviewer asks Ali Bapir to assess his own assessment of himself as an Islamic figure. He concedes, modestly, that with Allah's help, he has important messages to impart. He then goes on to discuss the IG, both before and after his imprisonment, and gives his views on changes to the IGs political programme. He denies that, as some have stated, his

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release would lead to the IG becoming more extreme. He stresses his commitment to consensus and dialogue but states his views that he has a duty to lead and he intends to fulfill that obligation. He points out, however, that he does not seek to be leader for any reasons of personal aggrandizement, egoism, or because he thinks himself better than others, but rather that Allah has bestowed gifts upon him that he is honour-bound to utilize in the service of Islam [T9:21-23].

He mentions the limited correspondence he had with the group when he was eventually allowed to communicate with those outside Camp Cropper, and the censorship to which his mail was subjected. The lack of information of any kind initially, especially in regard to his family, was difficult to cope with says Ali Bapir, and subsequently the prohibition on any correspondence of a political nature did cause him concern, especially as he was fed disinformation by the Americans about what the IG was doing [T9:24-26].

The ability to speak to his wife on the telephone was welcome but not without its difficulties as the Americans insisted that he spoke to her in Arabic, a language in which she was not fluent [T9:27].

The interviewer is keen to elicit further details about the day, as he puts it, Ali Bapir was "freed" but Ali Bapir again is keen to make the point that he was not freed but, released, and provides further information about those he met [T9:28]. He says he was so desperate for up-to-date information that on his release he recalls going round, waking people up in turn to question them during his first night of freedom. He describes his journey to Kurdistan and how he addressed a crowd of over 40,000 people. It was there that he was finally

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re-united with his children. The details of their meeting are very moving and he goes on to explain the speech he gave and express his thanks to the many good people that had campaigned on his behalf.[T9:29-31].

The remainder of the interview is taken up with a mixture of issues, some less important than others, such as the food he wanted to try first on his release [T9:31-32], to more serious issues such as the reasons for his arrest and his advice to those, like himself, who were detained and imprisoned without justification [T9:33-34].

When pressed about whether he had said or done, or not said and done, anything he now regretted, he replies that he honestly has no regrets on that score. He tell us that after careful reflection there is nothing he would have done or said differently, and even if offered the opportunity to avoid imprisonments in return for dissolving the IG, he would not have agreed [T9:36].

He condemns institutions like Camp Cropper and argues that political leaders have a responsibility to ensure that such places do not exist and castigates George Bush in particular for his failings in this regard. Once again, however, he acknowledges the kindness of some of the Americans he encountered in prison [T9:37].

In the last part of the interview, Ali Bapir is asked to define, based on his principles, key words and concepts such as 'war', 'prison', 'torture', 'America', 'treason', and 'loyalty', among many others. His responses provide us with yet more insights into Ali Bapir's compassion and his depth of thought [T940-42]. Of particular interest are his thoughts on Kurdistan [T9:43].

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In the very last question the interviewer asks Ali Bapir if there was anything he wanted to add that they had not already covered in the interviews that they had done together. In his answer, Ali Bapir provides the names of those arrested with him, details of an American assault in December 2003 on the leadership of the IG in Baghdad, and details of a meeting he had with the leadership of the IG five months before his release from prison [T9:44-45].

Towards the very end of this final interview Ali Bapir states:

"There is no doubt that much happened during that 22 months. I have told you part of the story but there is still much to tell. There are many psychological and spiritual aspects of life in that period that cannot yet be expressed" [T9:46].

What he has told us about his experiences, his deepening spirituality, and the development of himself as a man, and an Islamic leader, show us someone of genuine, and sincere, conviction; a man who is committed to his faith and the principles it espouses. But above all, his interviews reveal his compassion, his humanity, and his personal devotion to Allah.

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ADDITIONS

In the ADDITIONS section that accompanies the nine main interview TOPICS readers will find a number of documents, including a letter to the authorities at Camp Cropper in which Ali Bapir refutes the accusations the Americans made against him, a transcript of a speech written by Ali Bapir on his release from prison and a selection of letters to his wife and son that he wrote while in prison. There are also a number of photographs included, showing a number of individuals referred to during the course of the interviews, as well as photos of Ali Bapir, himself. There is an account of the demonstrations that were held in support of his release and photographs showing the destruction caused by the American bombing of the IG base on March 23, 2003.

The speech and letters, in particular, provide a summary of many of the issues and facts covered in throughout the 9 interview sessions. Ali Bapir's philosophy of life, based on Islamic principles, is expressed in his own inimitable style and we are provided with yet further insights into the many facets of this compelling figure.

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Introduction

On the afternoon of July 7, 2003, I learned that Mamosta Ali Bapir and his companion had been arrested by a large American force and taken against their will to an unknown location. They had been on their way to a pre-arranged meeting with American military personnel at the Ashur Hotel[1] in the resort of Dokan, situated on the Suleimani[2] -Dokan[3]

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(1) Ashur Hotel: a large tourist site located in Dokan district, near to the Jalal Talabany›s residency.

(2) Suleimani: a city in Southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq), built in1784 by Ibrahim pasha Baban, who made it an inhabited city and named it after his father, Suleiman. It borders with Iran and is located between (34-36) latitude and (45-46) longitude east of Greenwich. This mean it is located southwest of Asia and Southern Kurdistan. It is surrounded: in the northeast, by a chain of mountains, Azmr (1700m), Goizha (1525m) and Kaywan; in the south, by Baranan Mountain (1373m); in the east, the Shahrazoor Plain, that stretches for 45km one way and 15km in the other; and in the west, the Tasloja hills overlook it. Suleimani is 853m above sea level. Its climate is similar to that of the Mediterranean; it is cold and wet in the winter, hot and dry in the summer. There are great variations in the night and daytime temperatures and between different seasons of the year.

(3) Dokan: a district of the Suleimani Governorate and is also the name of Dokan Lake that is fed from a small river. The Dokan Dam produces electricity and it was the first dam in Iraq. Building commenced in 1954 and was finished in 1959. It is approximately 45km from the city of Suleimani. It is a beautiful region, surrounded by the Saraw Mountains and consequently has become a tourist area.

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highway, near the village of Qamchugha[1]. I felt distraught at the news as I had been the one who had arranged the meeting. The Americans had telephoned me to organize the time and location of this meeting, and afterwards I conveyed the invitation to Mamosta Ali Bapir personally, and also to his brothers in the Islamic Group leadership. They discussed the proposal and agreed to the meeting. My sadness was for the fact that I, more than anyone else, in arranging the meeting, had caused anguish to a fellow Muslim but also because my actions might cause problems and distress for other Muslims. However, I knew that these incidents could occur anywhere, and at any time, though this in itself caused me overwhelming distress, especially in the context of my efforts to bring solutions to difficult issues. My sadness at this time was primarily because the arrest had huge implications and was capable of being interpreted in a number of ways, all of them problematic. It reminded me so vividly of the many injustices, instances of oppression, and disrespect for the basic rights of human beings and the normal conventions of international law perpetrated in recent years. Each example was more painful than the last, not only wounding my soul and spirit but also the souls and spirits of all those who believe that a human being must, in all circumstances, be treated humanely and with compassion.

This incident involving the kidnapping and arrest of two individuals was a key catalyst in Kurdistan, which, as with so many other countries, is a land that aspires to freedom for

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(1) Qamchogha: a village located at the east of Dokan and now looks like an entrance to the town. Initially, it was a village in its own right but after the development of Dokan it became a district comprising 500 houses.

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its people. Kurds have serious debates and discussions about many important issues, including the imperialistic agenda and projects of the US in Iraq and Kurdistan, in particular, but also in the region and the world in general. We have to ask ourselves to what extent the US truly believes in the alliance which the secularist Kurdish leaders so frequently speak of. The extent to which the US is committed to restoring the rights of Kurds that have been violated for years by different Iraqi regimes is a key cause for concern. Similarly, the real position of the US with regard to returning Kirkuk(1) and other liberated areas is clearly a matter for discussion, investigation, and should involve, ultimately, a decision about the future control of the disputed territory. At some point it will be necessary, in the interests of justice, to talk about the massacres and degrading treatment of human beings that the US systematically perpetrates in Iraq, Afghanistan, as well as in Guantanamo(2), Bagram(3), and Abu-Ghreib(4) prisons.

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(1) Kirkuk: one of Iraq›s oil producing cities. It is 5000 years old. In the era of the Ottoman Empire it was the capital of Shahrazoor; Kurds, Arabs and Turcoman all live in it. During the Ba›athist regime an Arabization policy was implemented.

(2) Guantanamo: a prison located in the Guantanamo Gulf in the southeast of Cuba, 90km from Florida. This prison is located outside of US territory and has a deplorable reputation for human rights abuses and the flouting of US and international law. Amnesty international says America›s Guantanamo is the most uncivilized institution operating in this century. The US uses it to detain Afghanis without the benefit of trial as guaranteed under American law.

(3) Bagram: a large American air base in Afghanistan.

(4) Abu Ghraib prison: Baghdad›s central prison and is located near Abu Ghraib city. It is 32km from west Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. It was built in the 1950s by a British entrepreneur and is over 10km

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It was possible that this specific incident might have taken on a regional or international dimension because it was related to a known member of an Islamic faction. The fact that it involved well-known public figures is actually more scandalous than previous incidents that have taken place throughout the world instigated by prominent military, political, diplomatic and intelligence officers of the US and its allies. This incident was not only disrespectful of an Islamic personality, it showed scant respect for those Kurdish individuals above them who were members of the Kurdish authority because it was within the domain of Kurdish authority that this incident occurred.

As it happened, the matter did not receive international attention and remained a matter of only local concern. That situation pertained until the day all the brothers were released. The release, like the arrest, passed unnoticed on the international stage and failed to elicit any strong reaction because the initial repercussions were felt only at the local level. There were, in my opinion, a number of reasons for this.

First: I believe that none of the Kurdish leaders were prepared to take any action that would antagonize the US because, on the one hand, they had their own political agenda and, on the other, they were inextricably bound up and supportive of US projects and interests.

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square in area. It is surrounded by 24 security towers. In 2002, it was expanded and six more divisions were added to it. After the US invasion, this prison was handed over to the US army and subsequently numerous instances of inhumane treatment of their prisoners occurred there. Many photos have been published documenting the ill treatment of Iraqi prisoners.

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Unfortunately, the Kurdish leaders' concern for the media, cadres, and their institutions, along with their support for America, blinded them to such an extent that they were not able to report and cover the issues surrounding the abduction fairly and impartially. Not only that, they themselves added further pressure to the Islamic group by their stance towards it.

Second: The political, security and economic pressures under which the Islamic Group were placed resulted in them being preoccupied, and even possibly to some extent exhausted, by what they had to endure. Many of them became geographically scattered, displaced, and dislocated or found themselves in American prisons. Due to their inexperience and lack of skills, they could not coordinate the actions that could have put pressure on the US authority in Iraq and force them to release innocent detainees. I freely concede that, in my opinion, this was a regrettable weakness on the part of those striving for justice.

Despite that, we cannot ignore the fact that this leadership, through active cadres, worked day and night to save the Islamic Group and rescue it from the dire situation into which it had fallen, whether by accident or design. This situation encompassed all economic, financial, political, security and information aspects of the group and restricted its activities. For example, the annual Islamic Group budget was cut off by the Kurdish Administration for one year. This action was taken despite the arrests, continuous harassment, and the assassination of some of its members. However, Allah's support and the support of Muslims in Kurdistan resulted in the Islamic Group surviving without having to give up any of the principles upon which it was built. Subsequently, through

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participation in the election, the Islamic Group showed its strength and broke through the obstacles put in its path.

Third: We should not ignore the fact that the Arab media, including private and state run satellite TV channels, that normally would devote hours of coverage to the arrest or assassination of Arabs, Islamic and non-Islamic, famous or unknown, spent little or no time covering the tragic arrest of those Kurdish brothers in Dokan, some of whom were more famous than many Arab personalities. There can be no doubt that the broadcasting of this news through those channels would have brought the matter to the attention of the wider world and led to pressure being put on US authorities in Iraq.

Fourth: The majority of Kurdish writers and members of the elite are divided among various Kurdish parties, all of whom, with a small number of enlightened independents, shared the same highly critical view of the American action and characterized it as barbaric. However, all of the words written on the subject failed to find echoes outside Kurdistan.

Although those limited attempts to defend Mamosta Ali Bapir and his companions were necessary, we must here mention the vital role played by the Muslim masses throughout Kurdistan and in some European countries, in general, and members of Islamic Group in particular, during the period of the imprisonment of those honorable brothers. Action included:

• The mass demonstration in Suleimani and its surrounding area which it is estimated attracted around fifty thousand participants.

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• The mass demonstration in Hawler[1] and its surrounding area which involved between 15 and 20 thousand participants.

• A demonstration held in London, England arranged by the Kurdish community and members of Islamic Group in which numerous people participated.

• The gathering of thousands of signatures from different segments of Kurdish society for a petition for the release of those imprisoned.

• A conference in Suleimani under the banner of "A Support Conference for the release of Mamosta Ali Bapir", in which a number of politicians, intellectuals, religious scholars and social figures participated. A final declaration was composed and sent to relevant institutions.

Unfortunately, none of these activities resulted in the incident becoming a matter of regional or international concern. It may be that the timing and location of the activities was inappropriate or that the activities themselves were not the correct ones to highlight the injustice. This book can-

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(1) Hawler: a city in southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq). It is the oldest city in the world that is still inhabited. It is believed that Hawler was built before writing was invented. Script was a Sumerian invention that occurred after the Sumerians moved south, in 3200 BC, using knowledge from Hawler. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Hawler was called Urbil and it is said that it was built by Sumerians. The history of Hawler can be traced to 6000 B.C. In the Encyclopedia, the Kurds and Assyrians are the only people mentioned in relation to it. The earliest use of the name of Erbil (Hawler) was around 2300 B.C., in a Mekhyan text when, for the first time during the rule of King Eroroperes, Erbil was referred to as Urbilum.

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not compensate for all the inadequacies in the attempt to redress those failures and make the arrests worldwide news, nor can it repay the protagonists in this incident for the injustices they have endured. Perhaps, however, the determination of facts that hitherto have been impossible to discover, and which form the focus of this book, will go some way to repairing the damage. What the book does do is explore in detail what happened to Momosta Ali

Bapir during those twenty two months he spent in prison and recount his first hand experiences, based on his own testimony, of what he endured. It is not an investigation per se about the inhumane behavior and immoral conduct of American troops perpetrated in different parts of the world but it does highlight issues that may be taken up by others after reading this book. To that extent, it may act as both a catalyst and a powerful source of information that can be added to other existing sources that have documented the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo, Bagram, Abu Ghreb and other prisons. The same lack of morality that results in the barbaric behavior that occurs in Guantanamo leads to the same type of treatment being handed out in Bagram, Abu Ghreb, Cropper[1] and the other secret prisons set up by the CIA in Eastern Europe, Arab countries and the Middle East. In this brief introduction, I cannot cover all of these points as fully as I should like but the key issues can, at least, be identified. Today, concerns about human, individual, and col-

(1) Camp Cropper prison: a prison under the US control, near to Baghdad International Airport where the previous Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, was imprisoned until he was executed in 2006. This prison was built to house former Iraqi Ba›athist leaders but due to a deterioration in the political situation in Iraq and the spread of violence many other prisoners were kept there.

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lective rights have become universal and discussions about these matters are not restricted to a national level, as was the case in the last century. Neither are these debates limited to a small number of reformist intellectuals; they involve people from all classes, walks of life and nationalities. However, the discussions about those rights and how to monitor and record their violation has moved from the domain of moral principles, philosophical theories and sociopolitical ideology to real and practical domains inhabited by individuals and groups. Through this process of debate and discussion it is possible to analyze the mentality and the way of thinking of an individual American, and then we can ask, "What can be done to change the disrespectful attitude adopted by the US and allies towards non-Western nationals?"

After the Western capitalist block, led by the US, achieved victory over communism, it attempted to impose its own definitions of what constituted human rights and democracy on the entire global community, in the belief that their understanding of these concepts was indisputably correct. Some researchers believe that the US, after the end of the Cold War, looked at human rights as the same thing as US national interests(1). From the end of the Cold War until now, after imposing sanctions on Iraq and with the outbreak of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, involvement conflicts in other parts of the world and numerous interventions in the internal affairs of other countries, a double standard in how the US deals with issues has become all too apparent. Any brief, unbiased analysis of how the US deals with the Palestinian issue illustrates this point very clearly.

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(1) Ibid.

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This denigration of human beings and their spirit is not related purely to how the external face of American power, as manifested in its technological and military aspects and its superiority in relation to other powers, is used. The fact that there is no real counterbalance to American power has made the US dismissive of other's rights and makes it all the more willing to enforce its will rather than seek consensus. This has become something of a defining American characteristic. For example, if you take a typical American prison, the dehumanization and degradation of inmates is apparent for all to see and is a product of the power of the guards and the powerlessness of prisoners. This approach to incarceration reveals how the average American thinks about how inmates of prisons should be treated. It reflects an inherent alienation from basic moral values and indicates an attitude to prisoners that is based on them being seen not as fellow human beings but as commodities or materials. These attitudes and opinions are the source of the disrespect for human beings as individuals, and for their souls and their feelings, that Americans show in their dealings with foreigners. It can be argued that the disrespect shown to opponents by Americans is not intentional; it is the inevitable outcome of flawed ways of thinking in which the Americans, too, become victims. Whether these attitudes are as a result of secularism, modernity, post modernity or any other social changes, Almighty Allah says in this regard, "they forgot Allah and thus He made them forget themselves" (Al-Hashr: 19). No doubt forgetting Allah and His program for how best to conduct oneself throughout life and in dealing with others is, more than anything else, a basis for self-destruction.

"In a world which is stripped of all values, all things become equal, and then all things become relative, and when

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this happens it becomes very difficult to judge or separate good from bad, justice from injustice, see the difference between the substantive and the relative. Finally, the separation of the human being from nature or from material becomes impossible."

In this situation issues arise such as, "How can disputes and disagreements be settled?" and "How can differences be resolved?" These questions are central to human existence but in the absence of universal infinite values, by which people live their lives, individuals and ethnic groups will become their own authorities. Whatever is deemed to be in their own interest inevitably becomes good and right and whatever does not serve their interests becomes bad[1].

If the most powerful believe in and hold the highest human values, and have concepts of universal, infinite, values that help order life, and understand that they themselves are not the center of this universe, then, no one in their power will be subject to degradation. In this situation, no matter how much power an individual, group or state has over another, those values will ensure that no one is humiliated, either physically or morally. Moreover, the more powerful a group that holds universally applicable values is, the more tolerant and compassionate it will be.

For example, when Islam was at its most powerful, particularly in its early days when great Muslim forces faced other nations and ethnic groups on the battle field, there is no substantial evidence of a systematic approach to those defeated involving unlawful killing, torture, hanging or impris-

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(1) Modernity and the Smoke of Gunpowder", Dr. Abdulwahhab Al-Masiri

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onment. On the contrary, most prisoners were released with honor, providing Muslims little in return or they voluntarily became Muslims themselves.

A power which derives its inspiration from a religion or a set of values in which human rights are protected will not only never consider violating human rights but will also never wish to use its force and power unjustly. Such a power knows that when coercion and wisdom are separated, it is not only the opponent that is destroyed and ruined but the power using coercion is itself subject to the same fate.

The current situation into which the US administration and its various forces have fallen is not new. Many have been there before and many will be again. In essence, it is the conflict between the ability to coerce and the dictates of reason and wisdom.

The well- known Egyptian author and playwright, Tewfik Al-Hakeem, through one of his famous plays, Suleiman the Wise, published in 1943 , re-addressed the conflict between the use of force and wisdom.

In this play he gave a power to Prophet Suleiman (peace be upon him), which until recently, no leader had. It was a material force or power, that being unseen could not be prevented from achieving its goal. This force is similar to that which owners of inter-continental ballistic missiles have, that is, the ability to attack without the fear of retaliation.

In the play, the allure of power did not make Suleiman forget the virtue of applying wisdom in governing others. He was a prophet, and as he received all his instructions from God, he knew very well that the progress and growth that

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a believer makes in this life is dependent on ensuring that wisdom wins out over force and not vice versa.

This prophet (peace be upon him) like other prophets, governed by balancing wisdom and force. He did not wrong any person, entity, group or nation, nor did he use his unique power to demonstrate his omnipotence on the earth, in an exhibition that today would be called 'flexing one's muscles'.

This current prevailing circumstances is that the US feels, following the events of September 11, 2001, that it has lost prestige and face in the eyes of the world and is determined, by any means possible, through the use of its power and wealth, to return to what it believes were the heights of prestige that it enjoyed before the attack. This determination has made it behave in a way that lacks any semblance of wisdom and instead policies are based on the idea that the most powerful state can, and is entitled to, invade and destroy any lesser state.(1)

Today, due to the use of its power and authority, the US has turned parts of the world into veritable graveyards that look like "Death Houses" with the smell of dead bodies and their unnatural color all adding to the sense of despair and horror that the onlooker experiences. George Bush presented complex matters as simple matters of black and white choices and insisted that individuals, groups and nations had to choose between the white and the black, the good and the bad, with, of course, the implication that choosing the US was the choice of those on the "right" side. There was no third option or half way house. The use of America's power in

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(1) Dr. Imadaddin Khalil, 'Memoirs about September 11th', Notions in Short Essays, p11-14.

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this context was not moderated by any concepts of an overarching morality, nor any religious doctrine. International norms and agreements were simply ignored unless they happened to coincide with American perspectives on any issue. The result was the devastation seen in Iraq, all justified on the grounds of necessary force. The inescapable conclusion is that the American approach continues to present a very real threat to a great part of the world, particularly the Islamic world, and could potentially bring about its destruction and disintegration.

I have explored current American attitudes towards human rights because a failure to do so would render any examination of the arrest and kidnapping of Kurdish citizens and personalities invalid. The incident cannot be viewed in a vacuum and none of those incidents initiated by American officials can be divorced from the ideas rooted in the minds of Western, especially, American individuals. It would simply not be reasonable to discuss the arrest of Mamosta Ali Bapir and other brothers without reference to Western, and specifically American, understanding of democracy, human rights and the freedoms which they have curtailed, particularly those of Muslims and Easterners.

The fundamental question is: "What must be done to prevent the current, prevalent, instances of disrespect shown to fellow human beings today in the name, allegedly, of spreading democracy, a culture of tolerance, a respect for human rights and its freedoms, and all the other prizes promised by Western powers?" This question has been asked in the past and is still a live issue today. It is not that nothing has been done, or that individuals and organizations have not addressed these issues before. Indeed, there are examples

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of action taken and activists in the human rights field have emerged, many of whom are Americans working in America. There can be little doubt that what is required to guarantee more respect for human rights is that intellectuals and enlightened people, and those who have any conscience at all, recognize their personal responsibility to end a tragic situation. For a resolution to be found, states and all political entities must abide by the principles of the sanctity of human rights which enjoy religious and international consensus. When everyone accepts their personal responsibility, only then will we see an end to unlawful imprisonment and the end of the inhumane and degrading treatment of fellow human beings such as that suffered by Mamosta Ali Bapir and his companions.

Hawzhin Omer
Suleimani
20/3/ 2006 - 20/02/1427 H

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TOPIC 1 Background to the Arrest

13/06/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Dear Sheikh Ali Bapir, by way of an introduction can you tell us about the period that preceded your arrest? In this period, what injustices, in your opinion, was the Islamic Group (IG) subjected to? What was the status of the Ansar[1] Group (AG) at that time?

Ali Bapir: In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and praises be on the Prophet Muhammad, his family, his companion, and on those who were guided with his guidance … as is well known to everyone, based on various agreements, the previous Islamic Movement (IM) was located in the Hawraman and Sharazoor areas. Representatives from all these bases were summoned in August, 2001 to the first conference of the Islamic Unity Movement. When the summary of its deliberations was published, some disagreed with the determinations reached. After nine months of waiting and continuous debate and discussion, those of

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(1) Ansar Al-Islam: after the unification of Jundul_Islam with the Islah group of Mamosta Krekar, the name Jundul_Islam was changed to Ansar Al-Islam, declared on 12/12/2001.

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us who agreed with the outcomes of the conference became convinced that our only option was to declare the Islamic Group. This we did on May 31, 2001. At that time, we stated that the Islamic Group was the same entity as the Islamic Unity Movement (IUM), only the name was changed.

We declared that we intended to carry on the same struggle and were the inheritors of the glories of the IUM. As a consequence of what happened to the members of the previous IUM, the IG came to comprise the majority of the leaders present at the conference, as well as most of the forces and their centres and bases. It was to all intents and purposes synonymous with the Islamic Unity Group but under a different name, with some variation in its programs and bylaws which the Islamic Group leadership believed would be beneficial for the promotion of Islam. The honourable Mullah Ali Abdul-Aziz[1] retained the name Islamic Movement, and it continued to exist in and around the town of Halabja.[2] There was another faction that remained neutral and followed the Honourable Sheikh Muhammad Barzinjee and Kak Qasim and other leaders. Later, they all joined the Islamic Group.

The Soran's Second force and others that were scattered in various places declared the Jundul al–Islam.[3] Small groups

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(1) Mullah Ali Abdul-Aziz: a prominent religious and social figure in Halabja and its surrounding area. He became the second General Guide of the Islamic Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan, after replacing his brother, Mullah Othman. He died in London on 17/3/2006.

(2) Halabja: a medium sized city in Southern Kurdistan, located 83 km to the southeast of Suleimani. To its northeast and the south are the Hawraman, Shinroy and Balamo mountains. The city was bombarded by the Ba›athist regime with chemical weapons in 1988; as a result, 5000 people died.

(3) Jundul_Islam: an Islamic group that declared itself on 01/09/2001. It comprised Soran›s Second Force of the previous Islamic Movement

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affiliated to the Tawhid[1] and Hamas[2] were also formed and, in due course, all three groups, Jund al- Islam, Tawhid, and Hamas, administered by Mamosta Krekar,[3] united and formed the Ansar al-Islam and chose Mamosta Krekar as their elder brother.

So at that time, preceding my arrest, that was the state of the Islamic Unity Movement. The main incident which I want to mention was the martyrdom of Mamosta Abdullah Qasrey,[4] the political bureau member of the Islamic Group, who was very talented and powerful, and was loved by our Muslim people. He exerted a strong influence over those who heard his speeches and sermons, and even more influence on those who mixed with him and knew him personally.

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and a number who worked under the names of Tawhid and Jihad. The leader of this group was Abu Abdullah Ash-shafi›i.

(1) Tawhid: young people from the city of Hawler who went to Qandil Mountain and engaged in fighting with KDP forces. 17 of them were killed. In revenge, they assassinated Franso Hariri, a prominent member of the KDP and the mayor of Hawler.

(2) Hamas: in the previous Islamic Movement several people declared themselves as members of Hamas as a reaction against the PUK and the perceived softness of the Islamic Movement. The leader of this group (Hassan Sofi) was killed in suspicious circumstances.

(3) Mamosta Krekar: his full name is Najmuddin Faraj Ahmad. He lives in Norway and was the politburo member of the Islamic movement. He was appointed as the leader (Amir) of Ansar Al-Islam in 2003.

(4) Mamosta Abdullah Qasrey: a member of the political bureau of the Islamic Movement. He was martyred, together with his four body guards (Sheikh Dleir Hassan Ismail, Abdul-jabbar Muhammad Perot, Muhammad Amen Rasul, and Ahmad Hassan Muhammad), on 4/3/2003 at the Tasloja check point by the PUK security forces.

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We had a meeting arranged of the political bureau of the Islamic Group and he returned to the Rania[1] area to attend. At the Tasloja[2] check- point he was unjustly martyred, or as modern terminology would have it, assassinated. It is clear that the attack was planned and executed by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)[3]. Following the assassination, the PUK said that it had been a mistake because they thought that the car he was travelling in belonged to Ansar, and that the attack was not carried out deliberately. This was one of many instances of injustice suffered by the Islamic Group.

We determined that the situation required us to be patient, and later Mam Jalal (Talabani)[4], the PUK general secretary, on more than one occasion sent us letters to which we replied. In his last letter, he confirmed that the attack was a mistake and it was not intentional. In my response to this letter, I wrote "Whether it was a mistake or intentional, according to Islamic Sharia Law, for the perpetration of any such crime, there is a ruling. So, if it was intentional there is a punishment, but if it was a mistake there should still be a punishment of sorts. We have not seen any action taken against those who carried out this crime." It seemed to us that those involved simply wanted to bury the incident.

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(1) Rania: a medium-size city (district) 100km from Suleimani City. It is part of the Suleimani Governorate, where the Kurdish Uprising in 1991 started.

(2) Tasloja: a small city located at the northwestern gate of Suleimani City, and has a check point.

(3) Patriotic Union of Kurdistan: the second main Kurdish political party founded by Jalal Talabani (the current Iraqi president) on 01/06/1976. Its area of greatest influence is in Suleimani Governorate.

(4) Mam Jalal (Jalal Talabani): the secretary General and founder of the PUK. He was born in 1933 and he is the seventh president of Iraq.

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The second incident, perhaps disaster would be a better word, that was a great injustice, was the bombardment of our bases[1] by US missiles. This attack killed forty three of our brothers, may Allah accept them as martyrs, and more than fifty others were wounded. In addition, there was considerable loss of material, including valuable vehicles.

The motive for the attack was, for us, perplexing. We had not spoken out against the US but nonetheless we were bombarded by missiles. It is true that we did not welcome the US coming to Iraq as we saw this as a non-Muslim country invading a Muslim land. We wanted the Ba'thist regime to be toppled but we did not want Americans to be directly involved. We would have preferred that the US, or indeed anyone else, had helped the opposition and the Iraqi people indirectly so that they could change the regime by themselves. Irrespective of that, what happened happened. We applauded the fall of the regime, but indeed we resented the US occupying Iraq, using the excuse of removing the regime. We did not hide our opinion, and when I was asked in prison, I said that we did not welcome the occupation of Iraq by the US, although we welcomed the removal of the regime. The removal of the regime could have been accomplished without the invasion of Iraq, which had now created a major problem for everyone. It became a headache for the US because it had no plan to deal with it. The occupation also created numerous issues for the Iraqi people.

The attack came as a complete surprise to us. Some might say the leadership's failure to vacate our bases when an attack,

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(1) Bombardment of our bases by missiles: On the night of March 21st, 2003, our bases came under missile attacks launched by US forces in the Ahmadawa area which resulted in the martyrdom of 43 of our peshmargas (fighters) while they were sleeping.

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in retrospect, might have seemed likely is evidence of its naivety. The reason was because we had not exhibited any antagonism towards, or indeed support for, the Americans. We did not regard ourselves as an anti-US party and everyone was aware that we were against the Iraqi regime and wanted to see it toppled, destroyed and removed, as had happened. Consequently, we did not take any precautions against an attack.

So, the question became did the US directly chose to bombard our bases and positions by missiles or had the PUK helped them? The truth is that in reality we did not, and do not, know, or have enough information to confirm our suspicions. Subsequently, when we asked the Americans about the attack, they said that it was a mistake and that they had not known that the bases they attacked were ours. Whether they were misled or they misled themselves, the important point is that it was treated as a mistake. This was another example of a grave injustice against us.

We never expected the bombardment to happen to us and no one wanted to be the target of US missiles. The strange thing is that the PUK was fighting with Al-Ansar and we either mediated between them or retained a neutral position. Nonetheless, our bases were bombarded before those of Al-Ansar and our brothers were martyred before them!

What is worth mentioning here is that before these incidents happened, I personally told Mam Jahal and the PUK Political Bureau that we were different from Al-Ansar in every regard, in the way of thinking, and in our approach to Islamic work. Yes, we still regarded them as Muslim, but they did not share our way of thinking about Islamic work, the

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goal of Islamic work and its aspirations, or our approach to dealings with people and other political parties. That is why we wanted to move away from this area, because Al-Ansar had become associated with it. We felt that we did not want to be burnt by fire intended for them and so removing ourselves seemed the sensible option.

To be fair, in the beginning, Mam Jalal and some of his political bureau agreed with us but most of the brothers in the political bureau and leadership did not. I was constantly reiterating to them my belief that we must leave the area as soon as possible. Some of our brothers found it difficult to leave because they were residents of this area or had ties that made it difficult to leave. Some thought that if they left, others might stay behind and this would be disadvantageous to us. Many did not anticipate the dangers I foresaw. For whatever reason, they did not initially agree but finally our brothers agreed with me on moving out of the area, though on that occasion it was because Mam Jalal and the PUK had changed their minds!

Q: Yes Mamosta, this introduction raises other questions. One of them is the follow up to the case of Sheikh Abdullah Qasrey's assassination. What conclusions did you reach on this issue?

Ali Bapir: Until my arrest, the PUK did not show enough willingness to work with us. We asked them to form a joint committee on more than one occasion to investigate those who fired on Sheikh Abdullah from the checkpoint. From the evidence from a film of the incident it was clear that there were many people present, among them officials, whose faces were recognizable. The questions were, "Who ordered them

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to fire?" and "Why had they fired at him from the front before he reached the checkpoint?" Subsequently, some PUK officials made the excuse that the Sheikh had not stopped at the checkpoint. This claim was baseless because he was shot before he ever reached the checkpoint. The car he was in never reached the checkpoint so how could it have passed it? In fact, the PUK did not work with us and excused their position on the grounds that there was no chance of resolving the matter because the US came and we were all involved in fighting the Iraqi regime. In my opinion, this was the situation up until the point of my arrest. I do not know what transpired afterwards... I wrote several letters to Mam Jalal and he replied when we were in Darashmana[1]. He confirmed in a 3-4 page length letter that the incident was not intentional, was a mistake, and that I must accept his assurances and prepare for what was to come. Later, I wrote to him again and stated that some on our side might accept that it was a genuine mistake but that there were others who did not. I argued that the way forward was to form a joint committee to investigate this issue and find out once and for all whether it was a mistake or not. In either case, there had to be appropriate punishment following an investigation, and revenge taken if necessary. There was no follow up, that I know of, to the case.

Even now, since I have returned, I have not been made aware of whether our brothers followed up the case but the PUK did put themselves forward to work with us to investigate the matter.

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(1) Darashmana: a small village on the Iranian border, located in the Pishder area which belongs to Suleimani Governorate.

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Q: Mamosta, the Islamic Group knows who carried out this attack but not those who planned it?

Ali Bapir: Those who appear in the film are clearly identifiable. Perhaps there are brothers who have information about them. I did not ask them specifically but probably they have information and other proofs and know who they are.

Q: Is there evidence?

Ali Bapir: Yes.

Q: Mamosta, you talked about the bombardment. Sometime before the war, some US troops arrived in Iraq. What was the Islamic Group leadership's stand with regard to this and with regard to anticipated developments in Iraq?

Ali Bapir: In an interview I said that the US did not come here to fight us, which meant that we did not need to fight against it. Neither did it come to us as a guest, which would have made us welcome it and be content with their arrival. The US did not come in response to our call or with our agreement, did not cooperate with us, and did not ask our permission. Consequently, we did not welcome their intervention and we were not happy with it. However, the Americans did not declare that they had come to fight us, which would have meant us fighting back, but rather claimed they were there to change the Ba'athist regime. This regime was a long standing enemy of the Iraqi people, particularly the Kurds, and that is why we approved of the toppling of the regime but, at the same time, we never hid that we did not approve of US intervention. There were those who in the beginning welcomed American involvement and showered US soldiers with flowers and received them with joy but many later came to share our point of view and convictions about

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the occupation. I believe in the future all those who welcomed US involvement will come to see that the US came for its own purposes. Unfortunately, sometimes all of us are prone to being overcome by sentiment or make decisions based on assessments of our short term or temporary interests and neglect the larger, long term picture. We made huge mistakes and saw only our current condition or situation and forgot long-term needs. Our situation is similar to that of a dervish, that is a member of a Muslim ascetic order who claimed that his sheikh could fly. When people asked him how he flew, he replied, "he has wings and he flies". When people asked his sheikh if it was true that he could fly he replied, "No, such a thing is not possible". They told him of the dervish's claims but the sheikh insisted that the claim was untrue. They told the dervish that his sheikh had denied his story but he said, "the sheikh is mistaken, I know he has flown"!!

The US admitted that it came to Iraq for its own interests, and yet we have people here that said it came for our benefit. The US, itself, said it came for its own interests. The US plan to topple the Ba'athist regime was to a timescale that served those interests. If that was not the case, it would have removed the Ba'athists in the 1990s, when the regime was on the verge of collapse. One hundred thousand Iraqi troops had been captured, the regime was about to implode, and it just needed a push to send it over the edge for good. Why did they not apply that push at that time? The reason was that it did not suit American interests at that time to do so. The Americans calculated that it was in its best interests to allow the regime to continue. Why then topple the regime in 2003? Once again, because the US made the judgment that it was in their interests to do so.

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Yes, we welcomed the removal of the regime. Certainly that outcome was in our interests, too, but we must not believe that the US toppled the regime for our sake; it was simply that their interests and ours happened to coincide. The US presence in Kurdistan and Iraq, regrettably, led to us becoming indebted to the Americans. From the Islamic point of view, I cannot deviate from my principles and say that I am happy that the US is occupying Iraq, a country that is part of the Islamic heartland. It is true that the Ba'ath party was in power in Iraq and Saddam was a dictator, may God destroy him, but my dislike for Saddam did not make me like America, a country which persecutes all Muslims and wants to be the greatest power in the world. There is no hiding that ambition.

What is called globalization is, in reality, the Americanization of the world, and this is a fact that the US does not hide. It openly says that it wants to be the supreme power on this planet. People may think that the US came to serve people here but all experts and researchers say that, in fact, the US came to benefit from what is under Iraqi soil; that is gas, oil and the other natural resources that are available in the country and surrounding areas. All credible political researchers say the same and we must, at least, learn from them.

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Q: Before the US started the war against Iraq, a conference for the Iraqi opposition was held in London, England. At this conference, parties announced their alliance with the US in its war against the Ba'athist regime. Was the Islamic Group invited to that conference? It is obvious that the Islamic Group did not send a delegation. Did that not make the US more suspicious of the Islamic Group and, as a consequence, lead to the tragic incidences of the bombardment of Islamic Group bases?

Ali Bapir: We, as I understood it, were invited to that conference but was that invitation real or did one of the participants invite us on his own initiative? I do not know. The names of some that were invited were mentioned. We went to Tehran to travel from there as we did not have any other access. We did our best to attend but the authorities in Tehran did not help us nor were we able to obtain visas. In fact, we blame our friends in Iran, who said that they did not agree with that type of meeting. We also blame those who were in England. We had friends and supporters there, who said that Iranians did not help us. The important thing is that we were unable to travel and we returned from Tehran. I doubt whether this was the reason behind US anger at the Islamic Group. While we were unable to travel, two of our brothers did participate in this conference. Mushir Galali, and another brother, gave speeches and confirmed that in principle we were in agreement with the removal of Ba'thist regime because it was the enemy of Iraqi people, and particularly of the Kurdish people. They explained that our position did not mean we supported US policy. At that time, it appeared that the conference was about how best to topple the regime and to explore the ways that this goal could be achieved. A

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further issue for discussion was what would be done with the regime in the event of its overthrow. There was no clear indication that the conference was really about garnering support for the US. The talks were about how to deal with the regime. Matters such as what would happen in the event that the US attacked the regime and it collapsed were discussed.

We were part of the Iraqi opposition, and in other conferences held previously, in Salahaddin and New York, we attended. We were unable to participate fully in the London one, either because we were not invited or because no attempt was made to facilitate our participation.

Q: So, the Islamic Group was fully agreed on participating in that conference?

Ali Bapir: Yes.

Mamosta, let us come back to the Ansar issue. With regard to the ideology which Ansar held within the Islamic framework, to what date can the formation of their ideology be traced?

Ali Bapir: The root of the formation of Ansar is deep, because in the beginning they declared themselves under the name Jundul al-Islam. This was not until after the conference but even before they had existed and believed in the same ideology, with members mostly within Soran's Second Force. When they formed Jundul al-Islam, they still made up part of Soran's Second Force. The ideas originated there and it is clear by whom they were influenced.

How did this ideology develop? I believe that the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP)[1] dealings with Islamists with-

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(1) KDP: a major Kurdish nationalist party, founded on 16/08/1946

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in the areas under its control strongly affected them, leading some of them to react in a violent and confrontational way to the KDP's suppression. Many Islamists were in KDP prisons, held there without being questioned or sentenced. Some of them told me that they had been under arrest for between six months and a full year without ever being told why they had been arrested or were being investigated. They were arrested because they appeared to be committed Muslims or it was known that they definitely were Islamists and prayed regularly. Of course, such a violent environment has its consequences.

After that, in my opinion, some of the fighters who were in Soran's Second Force at that time travelled to Afghanistan or had contact with Arab extremists. There were other consequences and factors that bred these kinds of ideas. For example, books and booklets were photocopied. Alas, there are Muslim writers who believe that while they sit in London or Yemen or Afghanistan, they can send books and booklets to people in other countries without taking responsibility for their writings. Their views, they think, can be applied and practised without having any assessment of the circumstances of those countries actually involved and without taking into consideration that any personal fatwa (verdict) issued must be based on knowledge of two things, as ibnul-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah[1] says in his book (aalam al-muaqqieen): the first of these is knowledge about the ruling, and the second is knowledge about the context, the reality, of the environment in which the verdict is issued.

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by Mullah Mustafa Barzani. It is now led by his son Masud Barzani.

(1) Ibnul-Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah: a famous Islamic scholar (1292-1349) A.C. who was born in Damascus.

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Those photocopied books and booklets had an impact on developing this ideology, We were not aware of that, but had to deal with it. On many occasions I discussed the issue with Mamosta Mullah Othman[1] (may Allah shower mercy on him). During his tenure as leader, these ideas persisted and afterwards discussions continued with Mamosta Mullah Ali, who succeeded Mullah Othman as leader of the Islamic Movement and the Islamic Unity Movement. We told him that there were some brothers in Soran's Second Force who held these views.

On a few occasions we arrested some of them who called themselves "Hamas". We called them to account and imprisoned them. We talked to them and advised them. Some broke away from the Islamic Movement and went to the Qandil Mountains, where later a number were killed by the KDP. Then, the PUK brought the remainder back to the area controlled by the Socialist Party of Kurdistan. They caused further disruption, leading to the Socialist Party blaming the PUK for bringing them to the area. Later, they all joined together and formed Ansar al-Islam.

As I told you, their ideas had existed previously and I, in particular, was aware of these views. They were views held by some of our peshmargas, some of whom were my peshmargas in the Pishder front, Kak Asow Hawleri and other

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(1) Mullah Osman Abdul-Aziz: born in 1922 in Press village, near to Halabja. He studied with his father and Mullah Salih (the great) and obtained the Ijazah (religious scholarship license). He has published a number of books, the most famous one being his tafseer (Quranic Explanation) in 15 volumes. In 1987, he became the first General Guide of the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan. He passed away in Damascus on 15/5/1999.

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groups. We talked on a number of occasions with Mamosta Mullah Ali about the necessity of dealing with this issue. However, Mamosta Mullah Ali found himself isolated and felt opposed because we blamed him and criticized him because of the way he was leading the movement and for allowing his sons to do things which we believed to be un-Islamic, against Islamic Sharia law, and against the basic principles of Islam. Mamosta Mullah Ali, in his isolation, supported them, although we told him his stance would harm us. Rather than curtailing their activities, Mamosta Mullah Ali empowered them to the extent that they were able to collect money, whether it was from Mamosta Mullah Ali directly or from others probably living abroad. They had specific arrangements among themselves, links with the outside world and had sent people to Yemen, Afghanistan, and to other places to propagate their ideas. They were openly saying that they were preparing themselves to declare their movement.

They talked to me and other people on this subject, trying to convince us to accept their ideas, even asking me to become their leader and implement their plans.

I told them that we recognized Mamosta Mullah Ali as our leader and while we could decide on someone different, we would have to do so openly and not secretively. I told them that I did not see that it could be right to build a secret organization which, in my opinion, would not be legitimate. They invited Mullah Abdulghany to Biyara and slaughtered an ox for him, and also invited Mamosta Mullah Ali, kissed his hands and told him that they regarded him as their leader, all the while, secretly, now seeing him differently. They told me that it was no longer right to pray behind Mullah Ali. I told them that it was, and that I prayed behind him despite

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being aware of his faults which I openly acknowledged. I saw such a stance as legitimate as it did not involve doing anything underhanded or secretly. My view was that if we became convinced that we must break away from Mamosta Ali, we had to do that openly and tell him "Khuda hafiz".

So, from the beginning, they were aware of this position, and I told them that the foundation of their work was not "legitimate" because he was unaware of dissatisfaction with his leadership, while at the same time some regarded him as a non-Muslim, behind whom it was not permissible to pray. They argued that it was not acceptable to pray behind any person if he had said something which was "kufr" (that is disbelief). I replied that a person who said something that was kufr would be a Kafir (non-believer) and to that extent he would be someone that it would not be appropriate to pray behind. However, a person who uttered a kufr word could not be regarded as a kafir until he had been shown the proof of his transgression.

We were, then, aware of the activities of this group, and when they declared themselves, they did so according to the doctrines they believed in. After they declared themselves, they expanded their influence and contacted a number of Arabs. I do not know about the details of any agreements they made but whenever we met with PUK leaders, they told us that Ansar had contacts with others. I do not know to what extent the PUK information was true but I do know that the emergence of their beliefs dated to the period before the formation of the Islamic Unity Movement.

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Q: Could you please talk about the committee, which you headed, for the dissolution of Hamas?

Ali Bapir: After Hamas formed their group, I headed a delegation to sit down with them. Kak hajji Qasim and other brothers were with me, to convince them to desist. They were, in fact, not at a level which enabled them to understand properly my speeches. They were ordinary peshmargas. Their problem was that they did not have the right people at the leadership level. So they were content with someone who was an ordinary peshmarga one day, becoming a member of the leadership or a Consultancy Member the next, even if he lacked any deep understanding of religion, or a professed strong faith based on a higher level of piety. Often their leaders had been, until recently, ordinary peshmargas, supported by their friends and brothers; suddenly, they were important players. We sat with them and told them that their thinking was wrong and would have dire consequences. What is important here is that although we formed a committee and sat with them, we were not able to change their minds. As for the "Hamas Group", we arrested them and, when later, they decided not to leave the Islamic Movement, we expelled them.

Q: So they were not convinced?

Ali Bapir: No. Maybe some of them were convinced and returned to us but those groups stayed separate in the main.

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Q: Why did these ideas surface particularly within the Islamic Movement? Did this come about due to disputes within the Islamic Movement? Or it was an idea that came from outside the movement? It is said that the ideas had developed in places like Hawler city or that those who were influential among "Ansar" were mostly from Hawler. Was that the case? What was the reason for the emergence of these ideas in Kurdistan?

Ali Bapir: We cannot trace their development back to one factor. I believe there were many factors that played a part in the process. First, the political atmosphere that was created in Hawler, where the KDP closed all the mosques, and if any imam dared to say a few true words describing reality at that time, he was removed. This made the situation for Islamists very difficult. The KDP's violent approach to silencing and repressing the Islamic voice and Islamic activities rather than opening the door to dialogue and understanding had a great impact because for any action there is inevitably a reaction.

A second factor was the nature of youth and the people of Hawler, which was characterized by sentiment and zeal. These brothers were mainly young, most but not all of them were from Hawler. There were people from Suleimani, Sharazoor, Germian and other places, as well as from Hawraman, whose people are usually soft. As I said, the nature of these youths, motivated by zeal and prone to hot-bloodedness rather than deep thinking, was such that they were more susceptible to being influenced by these ideas.

The third factor was the attempt to copy the experiments of others such as the Taliban and those in Algeria through the books and booklets copied and brought to Kurdistan. The

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trips made by those who formed Ansar Al-Islam to Afghanistan, Yemen and similar places, and their meetings with people who shared their ideas was another factor.

The default position of the leadership of the Islamic Movement at that time, no doubt, also had an impact. We said that matters could not be solved in their way, but rather that the issues had to be discussed openly with the leadership, and if they were then still dissatisfied they should openly declare their position. They took the position that they would not do this but continue to kiss the leader's hands and greet him warmly, leaving him unaware of their true feelings, while secretly plotting to cut the feet from under him. I told them from the beginning that their approach had no legitimacy.

Q: There is an analysis that concludes that some members of Soran's Second Force had extreme and different ideas from those of the Islamic Movement and the Islamic Unity Movement. To what extent is this true?

Ali Bapir: In the beginning, I did not feel that. It can be argued that there are extremists everywhere. We probably have more extremists in Germian where, early on, there were instances of skirmishes and confrontations emanating from there. I believe extremists can be found everywhere. I believe a person becomes an extremist when he fails to read the circumstances properly and so does not know how to deal with them. It may be because he does not understand the Quran and the Sunnah properly, having not been sufficiently well versed in the true basis of the Quran and the Sunnah, and so unaware as to how to control personal conduct. Among the companions of the Prophet, in Makkah, if the Prophet (peace be upon him) had not educated them and raised

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them himself, things would have been done which were not in the spirit of Islam. Jundul al-Islam and Ansar al-Islam, in resorting to violence, did not understand that there could be no positive outcome. The companions, too, might have gone down this path but the Prophet (peace be upon him) said to them that they had to be patient and he prevented them from embarking on such a course. There was leadership, wise and guided leadership, from the Prophet himself. Unfortunately, we did not have that type of leadership at that time. As I told you, we made the leadership of Islamic movement aware of situation several times and argued that it had to be dealt with by sitting down with them. Instead, Ansar was empowered and re-enforced!

Q: What were the pillars of Ansar ideology? What are the important criticisms made by the Islamic Group of Ansar's ideas? What were the problematic ideas that Ansar espoused? Were your answers to Ansar's arguments documented?

Ali Bapir: I will start with the last question. Yes, it is all documented and available. At each stage I summoned our peshmarga forces, convened our leadership, and everything I said is either recorded on tape or on paper. I gathered our brothers, our own people, first and exhorted them not to fall under the influences of the immature ideas of Jund al-Islam and Ansar Al-Islam. Secondly, I tried to persuade Ansar members to listen and come on to the right path. Indeed, some two hundred were affected by those speeches and after listening, left Ansar and joined the Islamic Group, when it was officially declared. As for the bases of their doctrines, I can summarise these in a few points.

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Q: Forgive me Mamosta, before we go to the bases of Ansar ideas, it appears that there are a number of articles and writings on the internal levels and ranks of the Islamic Group that were written and distributed to show the flaws in Ansar thinking. Why were these articles and writings not publicized and made available to the public?

Ali Bapir: We were always gathering our people, peshmargas and cadres together. We made them aware of our views but it was not wise to broadcast this to public because we took into consideration the mentality of Ansar, which we deemed to be very short-sighted and incapable of absorbing our points. Despite all our patience and forbearing, they still, on at least three or four occasions, shot at us and injured some of our brothers in the process. We were convinced that they would not tolerate us exposing the truths we knew about their ideas or allow those truths to be understood by the public, because that would have resulted in an unfavourable reaction by the population at large. If we did expose them, then there was the danger that the people would decide that the Islamists were divided and killing each other. No one came forward to say these were advisers and those were advised, this one was right and this one was wrong. We feared it would become like other places that we had heard of, in Afghanistan, for example, where Islamic parties ended up fighting each other. We did not know who in Ansar was right and who was wrong. The important thing here is that the conflict could distort the image of Islam. Therefore, I advised that we should avoid anything which provoked them. However, when we met those in the lower ranks of Ansar, we told them of our views and tried to make them understand us. There were those who became convinced and joined the

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Islamic Group, or at least left Ansar and stopped promoting its ideology. This was the way to de-popularize their ideas.

Q: Mamosta, let us go back to the bases of Ansar ideas.

Ali Bapir: In terms of their ideological basis, the first mistake they made was that they did not understand their society. Those who propagate Islam after they become experts in the Quran and the Sunnah know the reality of the society they live in. Ansar did not understand Kurdish society properly and believed that anyone who was not with them was outside of Islam. In particular, they regarded all other political factions as non-Muslim. We told them that while it could be said that anything other than Islam was Kufr, and any program other than Islam was Kufr and false, you could not say that all of those who followed what they saw as an un-Islamic way were non-believers. Conclusions could not be reached without examining their situation and studying their cases in depth to understand what factors lay behind their actions, and under what circumstances, and how, they followed the ways deemed un-Islamic. It is not possible to have the same ruling for all, irrespective of context, because that is against all logic and reason. It is also not the Sunni way of judgement, a position confirmed by Islamic scholars' who say that "a person may say or do something which is regarded as disbelief without being himself a disbeliever". There are obstacles to excommunication and if certain conditions are not met then there can be no excommunication. Ansar did not seem to know that and sometimes even regarded us as non-Muslims because we were not with them!

Secondly, they had not really acquired enough knowledge and did not understand the reality they lived in. They did not

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know that Kurdish society is Muslim and if there were intellectual and political deviation, or there were mistakes made in some circumstances, they had to excuse this because there was no one who could, under the banner of Islam, defend the rights of oppressed Kurds. This meant that people were forced to follow other ways. There were no Muslim people, Islamists or Muslim leaders, on the ground to follow who could defend those oppressed or wronged and who could provide proper guidance. Why were the people obliged to follow other paths? As a Kurdish proverb says, "the drowning person will grasp any stick to rescue himself". In addition, as I said, they did not possess enough knowledge about the Quran and the Sunnah. They were dependent on copied books and booklets, as well as prepared materials. I told them that it was almighty Allah who spoke through the Quran and the Sunnah and that they did not provide any proofs from the Quran but rather said that such and such a person in a booklet said, or Abu Basir said so, or Abu Qatada said so, and so on. I replied, "Dear brothers! 'The far mud is a medicine'". I pointed out that we also have some knowledge about the Quran and the Sunnah, and asked why they did not take our views into consideration. I argued that some of those that they were listening too would no doubt have agreed with me if they knew the situation as I did. I told them that what I was telling them was good for Islamic work, good for Muslims, and good for the promotion of religiosity. The proverb, "the far brought mud is medicine" applied to them. They thought that since the messages were transmitted by email or fax in Arabic, it somehow had more legitimacy than the personal word of someone close at hand. Abu Baser sent a letter, in which he criticized us, and I wrote a booklet in response to his letter, which was translated later into Arabic. Not being

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well enough informed about the Quran and the Sunnah was their second mistake.

Their third was that they were not familiar with the Prophet's (peace be upon him) program to build an Islamic entity and an Islamic society. I told them that the Prophets (peace be upon them), particularly the last Prophet (peace be upon him), started their mission by calling people and not shooting them. You have to call people first: "**Say, 'This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allah; and I am not of those who associate others with him**'"(Yusuf:108). You have to call people, to make them understand what you want from them. Before you fight them, you at least have to call them; when they come to you, after you have called them, it might not be necessary to fight against them. As a consequence of not being well informed about the Quran and the Sunnah from the beginning, the Ansar failed to become acquainted with the reality of their society. In their approach, they believed in the efficacy of using military force. We attempted on numerous occasions to persuade them to join the Islamic Group, but they made a condition of joining that we declare war against the PUK. We explained that we had an agreement with the PUK and could not see how we could revoke this agreement unless the PUK did so. We decided that we would not be the ones to renege on the agreement. So their condition for joining the Islamic Group today was that we declare war on the PUK without warning. We said that we did not believe that it would be legitimate to end the agreement as we perceived that Islam derived benefits from the arrangement. We saw no benefits from starting a war with the PUK. We have to realize that fighting within Islam is not a goal in itself; it is a means

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to an end. Confrontation should only be entered into when there is no alternative. Ansar believed that it was important to fight, and it was important to say that the war had begun and that people had been killed. We repeatedly told them that military activities must serve political ends. When you fight or engage in a military activity, you must know whether this will achieve any legitimate political goal or not. War in itself is not a goal. Killing people in itself is not a goal. Islam does not condone bloodshed, neither the blood of its followers, nor the blood of its foes, unless it is shed lawfully, according to legal criteria and killing is necessary. Otherwise blood must not be shed. God has created human beings to be tested, therefore circumstances must be created so that all people are tested, both those who believe and those who do not.

A further mistake they made was that their treatment of people was un-Islamic. Laymen from Hawraman, Tawela, Byara or Sharazoor, who knew only a little of Islam, came and ordered people to grow beards, pray in groups and ordered women to wear a veil as well as the scarf, whereas Islamic scholars say that the "veil should be worn as a precaution or its preferable". With the exception of a few scholars, the consensus is that the wearing of a veil is not compulsory. So, instead of starting with the pillars of the faith and Islam, teaching people about lawful and unlawful things, about the fundamentals of Islam, they started with minor issues, many of which were in dispute. They started from the strictest positions and their treatment of people was harsh. When, as a result, they were attacked and left, the people, instead of being sad at their departure, rejoiced. When we left Hawraman and Sharazoor, we saw that people cried for us, lined up on

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the streets and wept at our departure. If you do not find a place among your people and do not make people love you and embrace you, how can you carry out the work of Islam?

Neither did they believe in dialogue with other political factions or display any willingness to sit with them. They criticized us for shaking hands and kissing Mam Jalal. For them this was like the end of the world. They called their Mamosta Krekar, who wore a suit, jacket and pants, a Kafir. Some of them went so far as to leave Ansar because of that and asked him how he could dress like a Kuffar. These types of narrow minded people do not believe in sitting down with others, while our Prophet (peace be upon him) sat down with his foes, the Jews and Christians, with polytheists and hypocrites. He invited them and they invited him, they came to the Prophet's mosque and took part in a poetry contest with him. The polytheists' poet wrote poems against Islam and the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Hassan bin Thabit to answer them as Gabriel would support him. The delegation from Najran came to the Prophet's mosque and conversed with him and said that Jesus was the son of God and the Prophet (peace be upon him) debated with them and conversed with them in his mosque, as it is reported by Bukhari. The Ansar did not believe in dialogue or anything other than fighting. This attitude is the basis of their mistaken ideology.

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Q: The perspective of Ansar and their stand towards the Islamic Group, and particularly you, is clear. It appears that their stand was more directed against you. What was their intellectual and practical position and viewpoint with regard to this? I heard that they attempted to assassinate you more than once. Could you please clarify whether that is true?

Ali Bapir: I will start with the last point. I have no information on whether they attempted to assassinate me or not. The TNT which was put in Khurmal's Greater Mosque proved to be the work of a non-Islamic political faction. If the explosives had not been discovered just a few hours before I arrived, the mosque and I would have been blown to bits. As to whether this was an assassination attempt on me, I do not have any information. They may have had some people who said some childish and foolish things, including calling me an infidel, but I have not heard that they attempted to assassinate me. I have no information in regard to this nor have I heard from the brothers that they had concrete information. The claim was spread from one individual to another but when we investigated, it proved to be untrue.

With regard to their viewpoints of the Islamic Group, these were based on the fact that we did not follow their program. They believed that we had to organize everything completely, and say to Mamosta Mullah Ali that he was our leader, only until we decided otherwise. It may be that they considered a violent way to remove him. We refused this type of approach, and said Mamosta Mullah Ali is our elder brother and that we had pledged allegiance to him. We could only dissolve this pledge in public, after we had shown him the proof and the reasons for his removal. That is why we, after

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the announcement of the results of the first conference of the Islamic Unity Movement, in August 2000, endured Mamosta Mullah Ali and his loyalists for nine months. I went to his home many times in his base, where we sat with him and, I remember now, suggested that Mamosta Ali could bring back twelve unsuccessful candidates for the leadership, as a way of gaining his agreement, but he would not. The Iranians intervened, they were always coming to us, and we told them please go to them. We told them that we are brothers in harmony. Brothers from Yakgirtoo, the Islamic Union of Kurdistan, also intervened,[1] as did Mamosta Salahaddin and his brothers. Other Islamic scholars and tribal leaders intervened and anyone who came to us left with hope but anyone who went to Mamosta Mullah Ali faced only intransigence. Ansar believed that we could do everything necessary by deceiving Mamosta Ali and making him believe that he was still regarded as the leader and afterwards, when appropriate, he could be removed. We did not share that view. They thought that we were acting unwisely as, in their opinion, you had to plan and cheat others, and that such an approach was legitimate and they had a fatwa authorizing their position. Who gave them that fatwa? It could not be right. This was the application of a double standard and blatant hypocrisy. They claimed that they had a true and legitimate fatwa allowing them to act secretly and deceive the leader by misleading him into thinking that he was the acknowledged head of the organization when in fact that was no longer the case. He was not even considered to be a true Muslim and the subterfuge was only to be maintained until the time was right for his

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(1) Islamic Union of Kurdistan (IUK): an Islamic party who declared itself on 6/4/2004. Mamosta Salahaddin Muhammad Baha›addin is the secretary general.

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removal. We continued to argue that this was not a legitimate way to act and that any sheikh who had issued this fatwa was in error. We regarded this fatwa as a mistake.

As for me, the brothers in the Islamic Group made me their elder brother. Given that Ansar's position towards the Islamic Group was that it lacked wise leadership because we did not agree to their plan to solve the problems of the Islamic Moment and Islamic Unity Movement, their attitude to me was not positive. They directed a great deal of propaganda against me because I was giving speeches, taking action, gathering people to us, including some from their ranks. As I said, 200 people left them and joined the Islamic Group. They became very upset with my speeches, and it is possible that the rumour that they were planning my assassination originated from that time. They were very upset with my very existence and might have thought that if I was not in the picture then their problems would be over and more would have joined Ansar. When they declared Jund al–Islam, they said that all peshmargas of the Islamic Group would join them. This declaration was based on that assumption, because they declared themselves after the foundation of the Islamic Group. They believed that if they declared themselves, all the peshmargas of the Islamic Group would defect to them. They did not realize that we had educated our people and they could not be deceived by sentimental speeches. This then, briefly, was their opinion and stand in relation to the Islamic Group.

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Q: They were propagating the notion that Mamosta Ali Bapir was Iran's man and that Iran was behind the Islamic Group. There are some other speeches saying similar things about this. Am I correct in pointing this out?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they said things against us, anywhere and at any time, different things against us and good for them, irrespective of whether they knew what they were saying was true or a lie. They continued to argue that lying was allowable if legitimate interests were served. I was surprised and saddened because there were pious and sincere people among them. I was surprised at how they had deceived themselves. Who persuaded them that it was acceptable to lie or slander me in order to defame me? This was done so that people would not listen to me because they knew that if I was listened to, I would hinder their agenda.

After it announced itself, there was a considerable amount of propaganda directed against the Islamic Group from Ansar and others, and from Islamic and non-Islamic groups.

One of the outright lies, which they continually propagated, was that the Islamic Group was backed by Iran. This was a total fabrication. I can tell you that when we declared the Islamic Group, Iranian friends officially invited me to meet them. At that meeting they told me that they were unhappy that we had declared the Islamic Group without consulting them. They saw themselves as mediators between the different groups and the only ones who could reconcile the differences between us. The last time I met with them in Tehran, before the declaration of the Islamic Group, I told them that they had imposed conditions on us, and Mamosta Ali Abdulaziz, on many occasions and we had abided by them but they

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had not kept their side of the agreements. I told them that we had always made concessions to them while they never had and that we could not wait any longer, because people had become hopeless and frustrated. I acknowledged to them that they had not been consulted about the declaration but suggested that they should not have been surprised.

They said that they did not understand how this had all come to pass but I told them that I was now explaining our position. When we declared the Islamic Group, the Iranians were very angry and upset. They threatened me and said that they would close our borders and not deal with us or officially recognize us. After that, they sent a high level delegation and asked me to change the name of the Islamic Group back to the Islamic Movement and in return they would persuade Mamosta Ali to join us again "or sit at home". I replied that if they made me change the name today, the day after they would be asking me to change the content of our program. We could not agree to that. Some of our brothers gave their opinion and argued that there was nothing wrong with changing our name again if that forced Mamosta Ali Abdulaziz to "sit at his home" or not have any relationship with us, as the Iranians promised. I disagreed and made it clear that I could not go along with them on this. The Iranians replied that my stance would be something that they would hold against me and that they felt aggrieved that I had neither consulted them nor agreed to their request, which they thought was in our best interests. Their view was that the Islamic Movement was a well-known name with widespread credibility while the Islamic Group was something new. I pointed out that there were shortcomings in the Islamic Movement and that many mistakes had been made under that banner. We needed to

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disassociate ourselves from those shortcomings and for that reason we would not change the name back again. They left none too happy and we did not change the name. This was the origin of the propaganda they directed at us.

In regard to the PUK and others, it is clear our position now is as it was previously. We believed that we had to deal with people, to compromise, to cooperate with different groups, in general terms. The KDP, the PUK, the Socialist Party and all other parties and factions coexisted with us, be they Islamic or non-Islamic. We believed in cooperation with them within the framework of Sharia. That was our strategy and our policy, so when the PUK made an agreement with us, it did not mean that they supported us or encouraged us to declare ourselves. I did not agree with the notion of an Islamic Republic, a powerful Islamic state, even though that might have had influence on the PUK, the KDP, and other parties in Kurdistan, and influenced developments in Iraq. If I was not ready to consult with them for my personal protection, there is no way I would have assented to coming under the influence of a secular party. That would have been totally inappropriate.

Q: Those who formed Ansar propounded ideas that were popular in the Arab world, particularly in the Gulf countries. There were those who wanted to make Ansar more visible. In this respect, to what extent did Ansar play a role in distorting the image of the Islamic Group?

Ali Bapir: In fact, they had a negative impact. It is very sad. We did not have the control of our relationships that was necessary. We only had one bureau for external relations in Tehran. We tried to open offices in both Turkey and Syria

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but we were unsuccessful. In fact, we did not have enough people and friends in the Gulf countries and other countries to convey our message or promote our image. Ansar did have people on the ground and their distortions and propaganda found a ready audience. Our true voice and image did not reach people and this had a negative impact, and still has. They directed many criticisms of us through the internet. Kak Abu Baser, who was based in London, who issued fatwas on numerous occasions, simply on the basis that we were willing to sit down with the PUK, KDP or other Kurdish factions. He knew nothing about us. Ansar told him that we were working with those groups and this was not in the interests of the people. We said that we were not prepared to act against Jund al–Islam, the previous name of Ansar al-Islam, or do anything against them. We pitied them for their mentality and the destiny which they inevitably faced. We were not antagonistic to the extent that we would act against an Islamic faction. Ansar contended that whatever meetings and agreements we had with the PUK, the KDP or other factions, were all directed against them. This was untrue. I wrote about the claims after we moved to Darashmana, under the name Ansar am Aghmar, and exposed the truth about this group. One of the group's negative aspects was that their leaders, when they were attacked and bombarded by rockets, all left and let their peshmargas die, particularly those who were guests and foreigners. Many of these did not know the area and their bodies were scattered in the valleys and mountains while their leaders fled against all tenets of Islamic Law. The leader is like a shield and as an old proverb says, "I made my Imam (leader) to come in front of me". The point being that the imam must always be in the forefront. I have no doubt that God almighty enabled me to prevent a disaster that pos-

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sibly might have befallen the Islamic Group. I believed this was my religious duty. You have to prevent disasters, not let people face trials alone and you run away.

Q: Mamosta, you talked about Arabs on some channels and there were speeches that suggested that after the Afghan war, Al-Qaida was scattered and a group of them, made up of Arabs, came to the border mountains of Ansar aI-Islam. To what extent was that true? Were those Arabs the remnant of the Al-Qaida organization or were they from neighbouring Iraq?

Ali Bapir: During the investigation and in the prison, I was asked those questions many times. My answer was that, in fact, I had no evidence one way or the other because our communications with Ansar were about trying to convince them to give up their ideas, it was only about advising them. We had no other relationship with them, nor were we privy to their secrets. As for any Arabs in the camp, Ansar did not allow them to mix with us and they were kept well apart from our bases. Presumably they did not want them to come under our influence in any way through hearing our speeches and opinions. We did hear from the PUK that Ansar had Al-Qaida members with them, including Abu Musa'b al-Zarqawi and others. In fact, I am personally aware they said as much in their speeches. However, I did not have any evidence that members of Al-Qaida were there. It is possible that they did come but I personally do not know, as I had no reliable information.

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Q: Can we say that they were not the remnants of Al-Qaida?

Ali Bapir: No information was available for me with regard to that. It is possible that they came, I do not know. Mam Jalal spoke of this many times. He was sure that it was the case and he claimed to have evidence. He said that all their activities had been recorded. However, I was not shown anything. If someone had evidence it should have been shown to me. In the absence of any proof, all I can say is that I do not know.

Q: Mamosta, let us come to the nature of the relationship you had with Ansar, the relationship between Ansar and the Islamic Group. On the ground, what was the relationship that bound Ansar and the Islamic Group?

Ali Bapir: We did not have any relationship on the ground. Their bases were separate from our bases.

Q: I mean by 'on the ground', geographical proximity. I am not implying that you fought together.

Ali Bapir: No, geographically our positions were near to each other. This does not mean that our positions would be bombarded first. We were near in that way. Apparently they wanted to have bases in Khormal.[1] We said they could not have a base there as we already had one in that location. They did have houses there and we would not expel them from their homes. We discussed the matter with the PUK and argued that they should not build houses for Ansar in

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(1) Khormal: an area (county) 10 km from the Halabja district. It is a historical site through which the River Zalm flows. Many people believe that it is the site of the city of Nimra which existed during the Sassanid era.

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other places. From a humanitarian perspective, we felt that the families should not be made homeless. They did not have other houses to which they could move. So their families lived amongst us but their actual bases were at a distance from ours. Sometimes, of course, our fighters and their fighters met each other, for example, in the Khormal bazar, or our people might go to Byara, or a delegation from them might come to meet us there. If there was an incident or we invited them to offer advice, then we would meet together. All our activities and attempts to persuade them were about trying to make them see that their own opinions and their ideas harmed themselves, us, and other Muslims.

Q: The Ansar Group did many improper things in the name of Islam. They made it difficult for Islamic work in Kurdistan, particularly for the Islamic Group. On the other hand, the Islamic Group was often accused of overlooking the actions of Ansar and it was suggested that these attacks, particularly on the PUK, were carried out under the cover of the Islamic Group. To what extend was this was true?

Ali Bapir: In regard to the fighting between Ansar and the PUK, we believed that it was a war. I will be fair, I will speak the truth to everyone. The PUK called Ansar terrorists because they killed some of their followers. I believe it was war. In a war, anyone who has a chance to fight the enemy will do so. Ansar claimed that the PUK started the war, and the PUK said that Ansar did. Sometimes PUK fighters, in ignorance, walked into minefields and many of them were killed. Sometimes Ansar ambushed the PUK at night. Fighting in a war is like that. What I do have an observation on was the killing of prisoners. I understood from Ansar pro-

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nouncements that they did not regard members of the PUK as Muslim. I told them that if they believed that individuals they had arrested were not Muslim, they must first give them the chance to convert to Islam and only if they did not accept could they consider killing them. I pointed out that they were killing prisoners without asking them to accept Islam. I said the same to Abu Wa'il[1], who was their judge and he agreed that I was right and that he had no answer to my point. He claimed that he had not been asked his opinion before the prisoners were executed. I asked him what kind of judge he was to allow this but he replied that the prisoners had been killed before they ever reached the base. I repeated my point that since Ansar did not regard the prisoners as Muslim, they were obliged to ask them to become Muslim, and only if they did not accept would it be legitimate to kill them[2]. I heard that a man had asked not to be killed as he was fasting and another who claimed that he had said the dawn prayer, but was still killed!

I believe that the killings carried out by the PUK and Ansar were harmful for both sides. I also believe that the PUK could have avoided some of the conflict. Ansar was always ready and actively looking for a fight. The PUK could have kept far away, but instead they carried out attacks on Ansar, some of which backfired on them. I heard that the PUK blamed themselves for those losses.

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(1) Abu Wa›il: an elderly Iraqi Arab, resident of Baghdad, and head of the legitimate committee of Jund al-Islam, and later Ansar al-Islam.

(2) Here, I am talking about their mentality and their own words, which does not mean that I regard this opinion as correct. The Quran says, «Thereafter (is the time) either for generosity, or ransom [according to what benefits Islam], until the war lays down its burden.»

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In regard to other matters, I have an observation on their treatment of people, many of whom they caused severe hardship. A truck full of boxes of soap was unloaded because there was a picture of a woman on their covers. They forced the owner to remove all those pictures with a blade because it was against Islamic law! This caused a great deal of upset to people without any justification. Women must wear veils, just as all men must come regularly for collective prayers and grow a beard. If someone made a mistake, a religious mistake, they charged him, they took money from him. It is possible that people did transgress but this was not the way to resolve these matters. They meted out worse punishments with some people, all because they had an immature understanding of Islam. This lack of understanding of Islam and Islamic work and their treatment of people resulted in Ansar not having even two fighters from Byara village, despite the fact that their base and centre of operations was in Byara. It is a sign of failure if you cannot recruit four fighters in a village of five hundred to six hundred homes. The inability to convince them to join is an indication that their treatment of people was wrong. Most of my observations on Ansar related to their treatment of people.

Q: Some newspapers and personalities claimed that Ansar were carrying out their activities while under the protection of the Islamic Group. How do you react to that claim?

Ali Bapir: This is not true. We had an agreement with the PUK, and we told Ansar that we kept our agreements with the PUK and regarded that position as legitimate. We made it clear that we would not condone attacks on the PUK and equally would not countenance PUK attacks on Ansar. We in-

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formed all relevant parties and up to the last minute we kept our promises, to both parties, neither supporting the PUK or Ansar in their attacks on one another. Everyone knows that. Whatever has been said contradicting this is false and untrue. However, when the PUK suffered defeats, they would often say that they had been defeated because the Islamic Group supported Ansar. Did they have any evidence? Their military leaders claimed they had. Their political leaders tried to cover their defeats by saying that the losses were because the Islamic Group supported Ansar. This assertion is baseless. All you need to do is ask the people of Sharazoor and Hawraman whether the Islamic Group helped Ansar. I am not saying that an individual peshmarga without our knowledge might have gone and supported Ansar, but that is another matter entirely. That kind of thing happens everywhere. It is possible that Ansar infiltrated the PUK and had people inside its ranks that might have helped Ansar. It is not true that the Islamic Group ever helped Ansar against the PUK. There were people inside the KDP who helped others but we in the Islamic Group had decided that if anyone acted in violation of the Islamic Group's policies, particularly by helping Ansar, we would expel him. I told our peshmarga brothers that any who thought as Ansar did should think carefully about their ideas, which we believed were a distortion of Islam. For those who still wanted to support Ansar, we offered transport and wished them God speed. They could not remain with us while working for Ansar and causing difficulties for us with others. We told our people frankly that we would not prevent anyone from leaving and we would not force anyone to agree with us. If they had been convinced by Ansar's ideology, then we certainly had no wish to prevent them leaving.

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Q: There was a duality in Ansar's stand. They regarded the Islamic Group's agreement with other political factions, particularly with the PUK, as illegitimate and un-Islamic. As we know, however, Ansar had meetings with the PUK leadership. In your opinion was this hypocrisy?

Ali Bapir: Kak Abdurrahman Abdurraheem mediated between Ansar and the PUK. In his interview with the Hawlati Newspaper[1], he said that up until that point Ansar had met with the PUK nine times. In most of those meetings Mamosta Krekar and Ansar were in attendance. This is strange! If it was legitimate for Ansar, why was it not legitimate for me? Our people told Ansar that our brothers in the Fatwa Bureau had a three hour session with them, during which one of them asked Ansar why they gave themselves permission to meet with the PUK but condemned such contact for others. Their reply was that the Islamic Group was not legitimate and therefore had no right to sit down with others. However, since we are a legitimate group we can meet who we want. No doubt Ansar said that this was not an acceptable excuse and in those intellectual exchanges many things of that nature were discussed, all of which are still available as we kept them. In fact, Ansar had no solid proof of any kind that supported their contentions.

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(1) Hawlati newspaper: the first independent non-governmental newspaper that was published for the first time in Kurdistan region, Suleimani, in 2000 and continues today.

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Q: Mamosta, during this stage in particular, which I call it your pre-arrest stage, in which all those injustices were perpetrated against the Islamic Group, there were instances when the Islamic Group leadership was criticised for various decisions. For example, your decision not to leave the area that was subsequently bombarded by rockets, leading to loss of life was highlighted. To what extent was that criticism justified? In your opinion, who was ultimately responsible for those events?

Ali Bapir: I have talked about that in the past. We asked the PUK several times to help us to vacate the area. I told you that initially our brothers did not approve that course of action but by the time our people became convinced that we should move, the PUK was not ready. Mam Jalal said that he would consult his political bureau. In effect, they shelved the issue until after the bombardment took place. After our brothers were convinced, I saw Mam Jalal but their minds could not be changed. Once Mam Jalal was ready, he suggested the Marga area was an appropriate place to go to. I pointed out to him that the Marga Front required the use of boats to get to and from. Consequently, we would run the risk of being stuck there. I suggested that if he wanted to help us then assisting us to go to the Pishder area was preferable, and certainly much better for us. He did not agree to us going to that area. On another occasion, Jalal told us to go to Chami Rezan[1] or Qaradagh[2]. We told him that he knew neither of those suggestions would be acceptable to us and

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(1) Chami Rezan: a tourist area, west of Suleimani, 40km from Suleimani centre.

(2) Qaradagh: a district of the Suleiman Governorate, 40 km south of Suleimani. It has 83 villages and a count named Sewsenan.

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that he clearly meant us to stay where we were. This attitude placed us in an impossible situation. We did not agree with his choices and, subsequently, he prevented us from going to the Marga, or other areas. His intention, it seems to me, was that we should stay where we already were. It also appears to me that this view was held, not only by Mam Jalal but was endorsed by the whole PUK leadership. Following Mam Jalal, Kak Kosrat(1) was very sympathetic to us and understood our viewpoint. Others, however, had different ideas. From time to time Mam Jalal had told me that the PUK's opinion was different to mine. It appears that he took that line not only with us, but also with others. Mam Jalal was usually more inclined towards a softer position and the promotion of mutual understanding, but with regard to us that was not the case. Whether that attitude was the opinion of one or all of them, they did not cooperate with us to facilitate our desire to leave the area, despite our insistence and constant demands. We expected that we would be burned by fire intended for Ansar, and be collateral damage from attacks on them. We truly expected that, but we did not have a choice as we had no here to go. There was no place to go.

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(1) Kosrat Rasul: born in 1952, in the village of Shewashok very near to Koisinjaqan. He is the first deputy of the general secretary of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and also the deputy of the president of KRG.

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Q: To what extent is it true that the leadership of the Islamic Group at that time was neither able to read the situation, or anticipate the dangers which others outside the Islamic Group identified, in particular that the US was serious in its fight against Iraq and Ansar?

Ali Bapir: This is not true, because Mam Jalal told me to tell Ansar that if they did not stop fighting with us and come to a settlement and stop the shooting, he would be forced to bring in Iranians, who would not listen to him. He threatened to bring Americans and said he did not care. Even though it would bring shame to him, he believed he would be forced to it because he would have no other choice. I made Ansar aware of the situation, although I do not recall whether I did so directly or whether I sent a brother to tell them that Mam Jalal's position was that if he was forced to, he would call upon anyone to remove Ansar from the area. They refused to believe the message. We knew very well that the US needed the PUK as well as other parties to cooperate in the fight against the Iraqi regime and the PUK could not cooperate with the US until it got rid of Ansar. To me, it was obvious and I told our brothers that Ansar would be attacked, so that the support of the PUK could be secured. The US needed the cooperation of the PUK and other parties. So any suggestion that the attack was unexpected is untrue. No, we knew there would be attacks but we did not know that we would be attacked. We knew they would attack Ansar but we did not know they would attack us too. We had no inkling of that. It is said that the innocent are careless, and because we did not have any reason to be suspicious we did not know the attack would start with us, although we had worked out there would be fighting in this area. We tried to relocate, not because we

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anticipated being attacked but because it was proving an uncomfortable area in which to base ourselves. You see people were killed while we watched, unable to do anything about it. Therefore, we concluded that we had to move out of this area if Ansar did not listen to us. It was better for us to leave this area.

Q: Would it not have been easier at that time, that is the stage before going to Darashmana and the bombardment, simply to lay down your arms and move to the cities?

Ali Bapir: No, we were not able to do that.

Q: Was it possible to come to the cities without having a particular base area?

Ali Bapir: This was not possible without an agreement with the PUK, with regard to our weapons. We had a dialogue with the PUK at that time, because the problem was not only that the US would attack Iraq and the regime would be destroyed and crushed, there was talk that the regime would counterattack against Kurdistan. We discussed that possibility and how we could defend Kurdistan. It would not have been rational to lay down our arms when we did not know what lay before us. At that time, people defamed us, claiming that nothing happened. They laid down their arms and did not want to defend Kurdistan. No one expected what subsequently transpired. There was a rumour that the regime was planning to launch an assault and Suleimani and Koya were in danger. The PUK asked us to bring our forces closer and send them to Chamchamal[1] and Kifri. We asked them for help in the form of extra weapons and equipment. Laying down arms at that time was inappropriate and there were very real reservations about doing so. As for

(1) Chamchamal: a district of the Suleimani Governorate, 40km from Suleimani.

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evacuation to Darashmana and the bombardment, if you like we can talk about it.

Q: Let us talk.

Ali Bapir: After our brothers were unlawfully martyred and wounded in Khurmal and Ahmadawa[1], may Allah accept them as martyrs, we underwent an unexpectedly difficult time. One or two delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran came to me in the mountains behind Ahmadawa (Ahmadabad), and told me that Agha Muhammaf Ja'afari had a good relationship with Mam Jalal, who was in charge of the Qarargah base, and Ramazan, before that was in Suleimani, and he had sent the delegation to ask me to come to Gulakhana[2] to see Mustaf sayed Qadir of the PUK. I was told he and his comrades, they would be there, and that I could go to Suleimani and reach an agreement with the PUK to move our bases. In order to avoid further losses in both people and resources I agreed. Mam Jalal and the delegation expressed their sorrow and seemed genuinely upset. We told them that things were not that desperate and that we had many supporters. We stated our opinion that it was unfortunate that the PUK had not listened to us before we had suffered losses. However, in order to minimize further damage, I went from Gulakhana to Suleimani. There I met Muhammad Hajji Mahmud, the secretary of the Socialist Party of Kurdistan, and his brother Kak Abdullah, in his office. They received us with genuine warmth and cooperated with us. So we went to Suleimani and we sat down with those friends and with the

(1) Ahmadawa: a large tourist village in the environs of Khormal, near to the Iranian border.

(2) Golakhana: a village located 10km from Khormal county. It is located in the northwest of Khormal.

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PUK political bureau. An agreement was reached to move our bases and to cooperate with us. We had our money with them and asked for the return of some of it. We had outstanding loans with them and they also rented cars for us and facilitated a number of security procedures for us. They also worked with us when we reached Darashmana, for example providing us with tents. When we arrived at our destination, local residents cooperated with us and received us warmly. The people of Betwein and Pishder opened their doors to us. So, that was the nature of our transition, through an agreement between us and the PUK, monitored by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Q: Mamosta, after the Darashmana stage, I believe in shura sessions there were discussions about the dissolution of the military bureau. When was that? How did that come about?

Ali Bapir: It was decided in the following way. We took up arms in the first place against the regime, secondly to defend our individual identity since every faction in Kurdistan, large or small, had armed militias to defend their existence, but our first priority was the defence of Kurdistan, our country and our people. In the beginning, we did not take up arms to liberate Kurdistan. We did not actually take up arms until after 1991. Before that we had peshmargas, martyrs, in the regime's prisons. Members of our organization were martyred through torture and on the battle front against the regime. After the regime collapsed, the original justification for having weapons no longer existed. However, we did not want to give the US the excuse it was looking for. We hoped that there would be a democratic system in which people would have the right to speak freely and to conduct their affairs

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freely. With the regime gone, there was no longer a threat to Kurdistan. We looked forward to a time when political factions lived in harmony and agreement but that did not mean that we were willing to give up our arms forever. We said we would only give up our heavy weapons but keep those needed for defending our positions and bases. That was the basis upon which the decision was taken. There was no justification for holding arms unnecessarily and burdening ourselves with them. Having weapons is not a goal in itself and that is a truth that will persist until the Day of Judgment. Weapons are a means to achieving a goal, and if your goal can be achieved without arms, so much the better. We did not have a large quantity of arms, our peshmargas were mostly poor and many had debts. We told them to sell their weapons and we kept a few to protect our bases and offices.

Q: Was there anyone within the Islamic Group that did not accept the new reality?

Ali Bapir: The majority found it difficult to accept the new situation, particularly the peshmargas. It is by God's favour that we, as the leadership of the Islamic Group, tried to train our people through teaching and understanding. We made matters clear for them and they trusted the leadership. So when we, as a leadership, made this decision and made the reasons clear to them, they accepted it. Yes, the decision weighed heavily on their hearts but I do not believe that anyone disobeyed the order or thought of doing anything other than accept our decision.

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Q: Did the dissolution of the military bureau result in you deserting the area?

Ali Bapir: We temporarily went to Darashmana and Pishdar because we had to find solutions for our people and forces. We had to move them to another place but later, when it was decided to abolish the military forces, the decision was made only for us and others. The extent to which others abided by the decision, or changed the names but kept their militias, is another matter. We did not indulge in any trickery and said openly that we no longer had any peshmarga forces. After we had been there a month or so, we let our peshmargas go. We left our positions and bases and came inside towns and cities.

Q: With regard to the mistakes made in this stage, we have two questions. First, what exactly were the mistakes made by the Islamic Group? Second, what were the mistakes the US made in regard to this situation?

Ali Bapir: With regard to our mistakes, the one I remember now had two elements.

The first is with regard to the decision to leave this area. I have made many mistakes but I did not have any culpability in this mistake. Right at the beginning, I was convinced that we must leave this area. As I have already said, once the PUK was ready, our brothers were not convinced, and later when we were convinced, the others were not ready.

The second mistake was that we wasted a great deal of time on Ansar trying to convince them to join the Islamic Group. Others thought that we were collaborating with each other. In fact, our involvement was nothing more than at-

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tempts to convince them, and to make the situation clear to them, to make them understand that what they were doing was mistaken and would have extremely bad consequences for us all. I believe we went well beyond reasonable limits to persuade them. We did not have to spend so much time with them. They believed that all these meetings and sessions were about defence or preparations if anything came to a head. They did not realise that they were only to convince them to abandon their ideas. We did not have to do that. Not all of us were involved in this effort. Some were very keen on the attempt. I felt that some of them did not understand Ansar ideas, or the intellectual roots of their thinking. I believed that members of Ansar did not make their own decisions, and others made decisions for them. On an intellectual level, they were connected to some sheikhs who gave them fatwas. If someone does not have the capacity to make decisions and his thoughts are flawed, actions do not stem from an understanding of reality and there is no point tiring yourself out trying to convince him of his errors. It is better to work to convince the sheikh who gave them the fatwa. We did not reach those people despite the time we spent and this is what led some to be unnecessarily suspicious of us. Often others concluded that we were planning to fight together or work together in other ways, but that was all untrue. It was only later that it was clear that all those contacts were merely attempts to change their minds.

Q: What mistakes did the Americans make?

Ali Bapir: I believe that US policy of waging war against Iraq was without the agreement of the UN. This was the fatal US mistake and one for which it is still paying the price. It is likely it will continue to pay that price into the foreseeable

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future, because any state demands democracy, protection of human rights, and a commitment to international accords implies an acceptance that no state should do anything that conflicts with either its own principles or those of the UN. This was the US's fatal mistake. The US thought through how to destroy the regime but it did not plan properly for the post war period and how to rebuild the apparatus of government. They simply dissolved everything. In Iran, when there was a coup or a revolution, this had not happened. The specific political pyramid which was ruling was removed, but the apparatus of the state and its institutions remained intact. The US made itself many enemies by its actions. Not all of those enemies were Ba'athists. It dissolved all state institutions, the ministry of information, the security service, the intelligence agencies, the military and non-military institutions. It rendered all those people who worked in those institutions, unemployed at a stroke. No doubt those who lost their careers were more inclined to fight against those they blamed for their situation. The motivation for their antagonism was not necessarily Islamic but more related to the issues of the basic needs of living.

Another mistake was that although we had heard about the US intelligence service and that annually the US spends billions of dollars on it, I was surprised when Colin Powell announced there were factories manufacturing chemical weapons in Khurmal and Sargat[1], and Ansar also had its own factory manufacturing chemical weapons. We contacted newspapers and numerous foreign TV channels and made it clear to them that the claim was false. We talked with them,

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(1) Sargat: a village in the Hawraman area, located behind Ahmadabad and Khormal, on the Iranian border.

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took them to look for themselves and told them to come and independently check the places named. We were about to have a problem with Ansar and later we told Ansar that it was in their interest to refute the allegation. We said that the accusation made against them should be dropped, because we knew it to be untrue. Members of the foreign media and journalists did come and check and they saw that there was nothing there. Nonetheless, the area became a target for attacks on the pretext that there was a chemical factory. I believe those who regarded themselves as the friends of the US misinformed the Americans. Later, Colin Powell admitted that they had made a mistake. A massive power such as the US, with all the resources and capacity at its disposal, should not have taken the action it did based on false information.

Q: After the rocket attack there was some suspicion about foreign journalists. Was receiving these journalists another mistake? It was suspected that some of them were not journalists but were, in fact, basically US intelligence agency trainees. Was this true?

Ali Bapir: It is possible that some of those journalists did belong to US and non-US intelligence agencies, but I do not think the US had any shortage of journalists who wanted to investigate those sites. The US has advanced military technology and has the capability of attacking any areas it chose. There were other people serving the US, so I do not believe that media personnel had been staffed by intelligence agents. If we went down that path we would have had to become suspicious of every journalist, fearing that he might be an agent. That would not have been fair, even if one or two probably were agents. Besides, it seemed to many of us that we benefited considerably from the journalists, not least from the

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fact that they exposed the truth that we had been targeted wrongfully. Colin Powell admitted that the US did make a mistake when they concluded that Khurmal, which was under our control, had a chemical factory in it. Getting the US to acknowledging the truth was a great achievement for us. I asked them in the prison what was the justification or the basis for the attack on us, and I asked how come a huge state could act on false information. The response was that they had been misled but it begs the question of why a power that regarded itself as the policeman of the world was so willing to hand over its decision making to others. I do not believe that the fear of the existence of intelligence agents embedded in media outlets should lead us to not engaging with them. If the US wanted to attack a place using rockets, it did not assist them in any way to have such agents with the media. It could pinpoint targets through its satellites and other means. Their advanced military technology provided them with many different methods of identifying targets.

Q: With regard to the relationship and sessions of the Islamic Group with the US, the mistakes the US made, and the false information it had about the region and about the Islamic Group, did you try to see the Americans, through any channel, to give them correct information directly from you? Did you send a message to them or write a letter to them?

Ali Bapir: We tried so many things. Our brothers in Hawler tried, in Kerkuk our brothers met with them, those in Suleimany met twice and on the occasion when my arrest took place, we thought we had a third appointment with them to clear up a number of issues for them about which they were not convinced. We went and presented ourselves

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to them as we really are. We told them that this was what we were, this is how we acted, and I asked them to compensate us for our brother's blood whom they had martyred or injured. I pointed out that they had been awarded 10 million dollars for each victim of the Lockerbie bombing. I said that Kurds, too, are human beings, just like Americans, and if you received 10 million dollars for one American, then you should give the same amount for each Kurd, or at the very least 10 million dollars for all of them, unless you regard Kurdish blood as being less valuable than your own and that cannot be the case. We wanted compensation for the deaths. William L. Eagleton, whom I spoke to, said that he would convey our claim to his superior, Paul Bremer, and others, as he did not have the authority to make a decision. He said that the matter had to be discussed by those above him. I said that they now knew that they had attacked us in error and the proof was that their ally, the PUK, with whom we had an accord to move our bases, had expressed their regret and sorrow and acknowledged that we were not a part of this war and had been wrongfully attacked. I said that acknowledgement of error was all very well but that we should be compensated. We thought they would but instead they wronged us again!

Q: Does this mean that the US did not want to face the facts, or to hear the truth from you, but rather it had its own agenda?

Ali Bapir: It appears that that was the case. We made it clear to the two men that we sat down with in Suleimani, Bell Stewart and William Egllton, in the office of the Conservative Party, that they had been told lies about us. We pointed out that if any of the claims were true, then the PUK would

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never have given us 2 million Iraqi Swiss dinars each month. We had an agreement with them. We were partially in the government with KDP friends. We were in harmony and we co-operated with each other to some extent. We had wanted to have an agreement with them in the past but up until recently they had not co-operated with us to any extent. We co-existed with the other political factions in harmony and brotherhood. We visited each other and I made many things clear to the Americans and they appeared to accept much of what I said. I believed that later William Eagleton made a fulsome apology for US actions and, as a result, they arranged a meeting with us at which I was arrested. Eagleton claimed to have no knowledge of the attack and repeatedly apologized for it(1). Consequently, I believed this man was as convinced as he seemed to be about our case. I hoped that he would make arrangement for us to meet with Paul Bremer in Baghdad so that we could put our arguments for compensation and to explain who we were and what we stood for as a political entity. Unfortunately, it appears that the US had different intentions or someone had convinced the US that we were an Islamic Group with a hostile agenda and so were not prepared to see us for what we truly were.

Q: Mamosta, I believe you wrote official letters to them?

Ali Bapir: When I was here I don't remember if I did. I had written to Colin Powell with regard to the false information about Khurmal. I wrote a letter telling him that the claims were baseless and that I had invited journalists and TV channels to the area. I urged him to review the information that he had but I do not remember other letters. Perhaps other brother had written, but I am not aware of them.

(1) Mr Jawhar Surchi and Mr Najat Surchi told me this.

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Q: Mamosta, in general what can we learn for future stages?

Ali Bapir: You mean what lessons can be learned from that experience?

Q: Having lived through this unhappy period and now that situation two years have gone by, what are the lessons that we can learn for the future?

Ali Bapir: Two things, in my opinion two main things.

First: We must continue the policy and the legal strategy we followed, which means that we have to start from the Quran and the Sunnah and be realistic. I summarize the strategy and policy concisely. Our decisions must be based on the Quran and the Sunnah in the context of the reality of any situation we find ourselves in. This includes recognizing the reality of the people and society in which we live. We must continue on that basis because we benefited considerably from that approach. Yes, people tried to distort our reputation and directed propaganda against us. They wanted to present a false image of what we were. However, as a result, it appeared that the straight path which the Islamic Group walked, despite our sacrifices and the wrongs done to us and the harassment we suffered, was the right one. That was manifested through the popular demonstrations, the votes, the collection of signatures and the love the Kurdish Muslim populace showed for us. All of this demonstrated that the truth will prevail, even if it is temporarily shut from sight. In fact, it was a true endorsement by the Kurdish Muslim population of our right and proper policies, our legal Islamic strategies, and our positive attitude to people. The Kurdish political leadership endorsed our policies and this is a lesson we must are learn. We must continue on the same path. This

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does not mean that we cannot improve specific details or that we do not make mistakes or have no shortcomings but as far as our general lines of work are concerned, in the main, we are sure that we began in the right way because we started from a true understanding of the Quran and the Sunnah, and a true analysis of the realities we faced.

The second weakness, and one that was used in propaganda against us, was the weakness in our relationships with key groups, especially in the outside world, and our inability to form strong links with the media. We had a powerful message but we did not know how to present that message and ourselves effectively. Those weaknesses enabled our enemies, both Islamic and non-Islamic, to unfairly distort our image, to label us negatively inside Kurdistan, Iraq and elsewhere. Beyond Iraq, we have to rectify those shortcomings in order to prevent the vilification that we have been subjected to. If we do not have a voice and an ability to promote a positive image of ourselves, we will not be able to counter the propaganda directed at us.

I have one point with regard to the behaviour of Ansar with people. I believe we have to remember the digging up of the graves of the Naqishbandi Sheikhs. Not only did they treat living people with disrespect and harass them mercilessly, they abused the dead as well. Unfortunately, some ignorant and ill-informed people, particularly those from eastern Kurdistan that we met in the Suleymania Palace Hotel, thought that we approved of these actions or that in some way that we had allowed them to happen, therefore they blamed us. I told them that they did not know the reality and that we were extremely upset about what had happened. We gave speeches in the niche of the Jihad Mosque telling everyone

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that the desecration of the graves was illegal and un-Islamic. This was in fact yet another example of Ansar's improper and un-Islamic mistakes, harmful to Islam and Muslims. Every dead Muslim must be respected but not only that, all the dead are due respect. As is reported from Bukhari, that one day the Prophet (peace be upon him), in the company of his companions passed the body of a dead Jewish man. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stood up but his companions said, "Oh Prophet of Allah, he is Jewish." He replied, "Does he not have a soul?" This was how the Prophet (peace be upon him) showed his respect. Sheikhs, scholars and others who advise people must make it clear that the Prophet (peace be upon him) taught that not only must every Muslim be respected but every human being alive or dead must be respected: "**And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam**"(Isra:70). God said that every human being, be he a kafir or Muslim must be respected, whether alive or dead. A human being whom God has created has to be treated as he would wish. I said that it was unacceptable that we were being associated with actions that were so clearly unlawful. We regarded what had taken place as evil and that it had injured our feelings and those of many Muslims because the Biara and Tawela sheikhs had served our people for such a long period of time. They had served the people, both in intellectual and social terms, and both within and outwith Kurdistan, and deserved respect. This does not mean I approve of a Sofi or a Darwesh propounding polytheism (shirk) or innovation (bidah) in dealing with the dead. However, advising people not to involve themselves in polytheism or innovation is one thing and the revenge of living people on the dead is another.

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Q: Was it Ansar's understanding of executing a legal ruling that it focused primarily on punishment and that they started from that point?

Ali Bapir: True, this was another example of poor thinking. I told them that an Islamic entity had the right and the duty to implement legal rulings but they were not yet an Islamic entity. I told them that the Islamic state does not start with legal punishments. Legal punishments stemmed from legal rulings but the vast majority of Islam is about teaching people about belief and faith, about worship, about what is lawful and what is not, about good and bad and about behaviour and conduct. It is essentially about nurturing people and providing for their needs. I told them that if they could not provide for the needs of people, could not pave a street, build a bridge, treat a sick person, teach an ignorant person, or generally provide any necessary service, then they had no right to mete out punishments. You can only punish people when you have served them and have guaranteed their rights. Only then is it acceptable to question their obedience and their fulfilment of duties and obligations. There is no doubt that Ansar did not understand this point as their ideas were based on their ill-informed perceptions with regard to the execution of legal rulings. They carried out punishments, irrespective of whether they were properly authorized and legal or not. This was a very real problem within their ranks.

One day, Mamosta Krekar personally recounted an incident in which he had castigated an Ansar fighter because of his improper treatment of a traveller from either Biara or just outside Biara. Ansar told this traveller that they had to punish him in public. The traveller accepted that he should be punished in private but Ansar insisted that it be carried

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out in public. I agree that a person like Mamosta Krekar, who was their elder brother, had the right to authorize a public punishment. Legal punishment has legal limits and any transgression must be proved. Moreover, there has to be witnesses and there must be a court and a judge appointed by the Islamic State. Individuals do not have the right to act as judge, jury, and executioner. On the other hand, all Muslims have the obligation and duty to confront vice and prevent wrongdoing when they can. It is the right of a properly constituted Islamic entity, however, to determine and implement legal rulings on any improper conduct. In the absence of an Islamic state, if the Muslims present are agreed on an authority that legitimate authority has the right to take action, but anyone who takes upon himself that right and imposes punishment on transgressors is acting outside his authority. We were aware that Ansar did mete out punishments which they had no right to do. No doubt this was a misunderstanding of the origins of, and regulations relating to, the implementation of legal rulings. They were mistaken in believing that they had become a state, an Islamic entity, and that they had the power and authority, hazhmoon, in this area. They could not become an Islamic state, the Islamic state has its own specific components.

Q: Mamosta, there are other cases that I would like you to assess. One of them was the martyrdom of Mamosta Abdullah Qasrey. He was your close friend. How did his martyrdom affect you emotionally?

Ali Bapir: What a personality he was! The martyrdom of Mamosta Abdullah Qasrey has very personal resonances with me. It was sheer betrayal and oppression. There was no justification for it at all. There is no explanation for it in

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my opinion, whether it was done on purpose or by mistake. It was totally unjustified because Mamosta Abdullah was a well-known and recognizable figure. He was distinguished and what can a vehicle do if it passes through a check point? This was an example of a particularly savage attack and wrong in so many ways, although, of course, the martyrdom of all our brothers left our hearts sore. The pain for Mamosta Abdullah had a specific impact, particularly given the condition and situation in which we were found ourselves at that time. We could not express our feelings about the oppression under which we laboured in a way that would have alleviated our grief. Sometimes a person in pain will shout out but we did not have a chance to scream or shout and this increased our pain and agony. The opposition parties did not offer even one iota of sympathy for their part in this tragedy. Yes, they wrote a letter and apologized but nothing else happened which added to our pain. Mamosta was a great man, a member of our political bureau, and loved wherever he went. It was terrible for him to be silenced and murdered in that way.

Q: Did you cry when you heard the news?

Ali Bapir: This is something that is better kept to myself, but I seldom cry for anything except for the sake of Allah. I often cry when I recite the Quran or when I beg Allah for his blessing. All human beings sometimes cry when they are unhappy.

Q: Mamosta, did you want revenge for this betrayal?

Ali Bapir: Some people think that Mamosta Abdulla was martyred. 43 of our brothers were martyred by rocket attacks. I was in prison and wondered what I would do. I was asked this question which was undoubtedly in the minds of

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our people and others. It was assumed that I might take action. Some speculated about how I might take revenge. I will say categorically that I believe true revenge for the wrongs done to our brothers, particularly to Mamosta Abdullah Qasrey, other martyrs, to me and to the Islamic Group since I was arrested, lies in achieving the goals of our group. The oppression endured by the Islamic Group and by our brothers who were arrested with me can only be atoned for by keeping to our plans. Our revenge will be in the realization of those goals for which the Islamic Group was established. I am willing to sacrifice my life for the goal of enabling Muslim people in both Kurdistan and Iraq to live an Islamic life. This goal will be realized when I see people living an Islamic life as individuals, as part of a family, as a member of a village or city, and when the country is ruled according to the law of God and our rights are returned to us. I see our revenge in the realization of all of those goals. Our ultimate ambition is to make people happy in this life and in the next by living according to Allah's laws and the rules as defined by Islam, the state religion. The official religion in this sense refers to the program and the way in which people conduct themselves. When Islam shapes the way of life of the people, my goal as an Islamist will be realized. To say that such and such a person was to be killed would have been a betrayal of our Muslim values. We do not have any personal hatred for anyone. To those who oppress us, if I could, I would tell them that I pray for Allah to guide them, help them not to oppress others and to avoid sin. To those who unlawfully shed blood, I ask that Allah guide them and show them the error of their ways. The Prophet (peace be upon him), in one of his speeches said, "Almighty Allah allows entry to paradise to some in chains". Those who interpret this speech say that those

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in chains were those arrested in battle and were disbelievers who later, under the auspices of the Islamic state, converted and became Muslim. So they entered Islam as prisoners but later became Muslims themselves. In fact, the goal of Islam is the regeneration of people.

Our goal can never be achieved by killing and this is the true message of the Prophets (peace be upon them) who, during their lives, were threatened, expelled, arrested, were the focus of assassination attempts, or actual murder, yet despite this, there is no verse in the Quran that suggests the Prophets (peace be upon them) ever threatened their opponents or in any way implied that they would be killed or arrested so that such a punishment could be carried out. On the contrary, they were always patient and said, "We depend on Allah. We seek refuge with Allah". Their opponents accused them of being liars but they calmly refuted that claim and did not retaliate by calling them liars. When the Prophets (peace be upon them) were accused of disturbing the tranquillity of the people they replied that that was not their intention. Everyone's actions are shaped by the way in which they have been brought up and trained.

Everything in our religion is about bringing happiness to people but when opponents come to stop you and fight against you, the laws of Allah, logic and personal conscience allows you to defend yourself. When the Islamic state conquered new lands, it did so to defend oppressed and bring them the message of Allah. It was not about imposing Islam on them, but rather it was a means of opening a path to allow the spread of the religion of Allah.

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Q: Mamosta, during the rocket bombardment were you in your base? What were you doing?

Ali Bapir: At that time, I was in my home, on my bed. Of course, my house and my base were only a few meters from each other. Kak Hajji Qasim came and asked me why I was there. He urged me not to sleep there but to go to a safer place. I replied that all the other brothers were in their bases and I would also remain. He tried to insist that I go and said that he would stay in my stead. Eventually, he said that if I stayed then he would too. He slept in the base and I slept at home. I lay down on my bed. I was half asleep and half awake, very tired because I had returned from a trip the day before. I heard the thunder of attack, followed by cries, moans. I then felt something very strange, and a voice I had never heard before telling me that Mam Jalal had sent me a letter. The letter came in the form of a telegram. It did not contain any warning that we would be attacked or anything like that but there were accusations against me. I immediately decided that I had to send a response to Mam Jalal the same night and I wrote to him saying that I had written to him some time ago, bringing up a number of issues. I asked him why he was now blaming us for certain actions. I smelt that something was wrong and I asked him whether there might be a plot and whether these accusations were just an excuse to act against us. I wanted my reply to be delivered immediately but the unexpected events of that night made that impossible. That delay made it appear there was a degree of anxiety and hesitation on our part and indeed, people were, in general, hesitant and uncertain. People were expecting that something would happen but we believed that any action would be directed against Ansar.

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Q: When you heard the voice, what was your reaction?

Ali Bapir: I went out immediately, my family and my children woke up and started to scream. Some brothers came in, but the rockets prevented them doing anything. The Americans began by attacking this area and then moved on to another one, continuing the bombardment. We thought it was one plane because when the rockets came, they had lights on them and so it looked like a plane. Later, our brothers told us that we had to move to higher ground where we could see what was happening. What I remember is that the rockets fell on our base for between 5 and 10 minutes. After the attack, we went to the bases in the Zalm area. Kak Hajji Qasim and Hajji Dilshad and other brothers came there. We talked about what had transpired. They told us the Americans had attacked our military bureau and also attacked bases in Raparin and Safin forces, as well as the bases in Sedaran. I sent some brothers to see what had happened. I feared that there might be further attacks on our other bases; therefore I said that the brothers must leave them.

So, we came under this attack. For us it was a very sad event and later we learned which of our brothers had been martyred or injured. We then formed a committee to deal with the collection of the bodies.

Q: Mamosta, you went alone to reach an agreement with the PUK. The brothers remained in a terrible situation and many were martyred and injured when the Iranians closed the border. Why did you go?

Ali Bapir: It was a risk. Many of the brothers did not agree with my choice, believing that there was a possibility that something could happen and that we would not be able to re-

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spond. The situation was such that we to save our remaining people. There was the possibility of ambush and attack but at that time two Iranian brothers were with us, Mr Hurmet and Mr Qurbani. One of them was a revolutionary guard and the other an intelligence agent. Mustafa Sayyed Qadir of the PUK was also with us. Our brothers, Mamosta Nasih and Kak Jamal Ashraf Qaramani, were with us while other brothers were busy.

Q: Were you sure you would be safe or not?

Ali Bapir: No, but I said if we went and reached an agreement, at least we could save our brothers. If we perished, we would be no different from all those of our brothers who had perished. God forgive us, in those circumstances, there was nothing certain. We did not know what would happen and that was why so many brothers disagreed with me and were upset. They believed that it was pointless going and dangerous. They wanted me to be escorted but I kept telling myself that if something was to happen, God forbid, then it was better for me to die alone. I felt that in these situations numbers were no guarantee of safety. The only safeguard was keeping alert to all the possibilities. I had to try because the US was preparing to attack us with rockets and planes.

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TOPIC 2 THE ARREST

13/06/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Mamosta, the first question we would like to ask you is how you were arrested?

Ali Bapir: In the name of God, I feel it is necessary to start the story of my arrest and torture by the Americans by telling you of a dream that I had 10 days beforehand, relating to events during my stay in prison and the timing of my release, all of which have come true. It proved to be an accurate dream. In my dream, almighty God came down to earth, and without saying or ordering me to do anything, took me to five ordinary rooms. He took me to each one personally and afterwards he took me from there. I woke up at that point and my dream ended.

During the 22 months of my stay in the prisons, my captors took me to five rooms. Whenever I was taken to a room, I recognized the room immediately from my dream as one that I been in with my lord.

I have to say I did not like visiting those rooms; I felt upset and miserable in every one!

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I was surprised at my reaction to my dream and could not reconcile my feelings of unhappiness with being in the presence of Almighty God. Why should I feel unhappy in such a situation? I discovered the reasons in prison.

Although while in prison I continued to worship and busied myself with Quranic recitation and contemplation in the presence of God, the most merciful, the most companionate, nonetheless I felt the desolation and hopelessness of being a prisoner.

As ultimately my arrest was Allah's will, so too was my release due to his grace. He was responsible for devising the means for my liberation.

I had a dream in prison that on my release I was reciting a verse, Yusuf. 100, which provided the explanation of the dream that God had made come true. I had this dream one year before the date of my release. (1)

(1) In an interview about my arrest and imprisonment by the Americans, which was published in the book Torture and Prison, p.80, second edition (Kurdish Edition), I talked about a dream, in which I saw almighty Allah; this dream became the subject of arguments and contentious discussions. Therefore, following requests from honourable brothers, I have found it is necessary to shed the light on the facts in regard to that event, no matter how short.

First: Ibn Sirin, in his book, Selected Explanations of the Speech in Dreams, and Abdulghani Annabilsi, in his book The Explanation of Mankind's Dreams (NOTE: I cannot see any context in which the word " Perfumed" would be used so I have omitted it but please review.) both talked about seeing almighty Allah in dreams. Ibn Sirin talked about this in the chapter in explaining the servant's dream in which he saw himself in front of his lord almighty, Allah (p.20, Volume 1). Annabilsi recounts the saying "Allah is unique, he is the all hearing

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and the all seeing." Seeing Him in a dream varies according to an individual's inner self (p. 8, Volume 1).

Also, Ibn Shahin Adhahiri in his book, The Book of References in the Science of Phrases, Chapter 1, "In seeing Allah", talked about this issue (see also p. 6, Volume 2).

Seeing Allah in a dream is normal for a person acquainted with the speeches and deliberations of scholars on this matter and there is no ambiguity.

Second: In Assioti's book, The Small Comprehensive, Almannawi wrote a commentary under the title "The Omni benevolence of Omnipotent Allah. (NOTE: Again, I have paraphrased as best I can since I am not sure that the translation of the book title given is correct – please review.) and confirmed this Hadith (tradition) as true." It is also said by Ibn Aabbas (may Allah be pleased with both of them), that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I saw my lord (Allah)", Ahmad reported this and Alhaithami said that the narrators of this Hadith are telling the truth (p. 8, Volume 4).

Then Almannawi, whose words I have translated literally into Kurdish, explains this Hadith: "Note, this Hadith was reported by Dar Al-Qitni and others from Anas and they added this "in His best picture". Which if he means he saw the true image of God. in the dream there is no ambiguity at that, but if he meant while he was awake, that is different. Kamal Ibn Humam was asked and he replied, "He meant by that the curtain of the image." (NOTE: I am not 100% sure what 'curtain of the image' can mean. Possibly "outline" or "silhouette" or possibly " veiled image". Please review).

Alqadhi, which means Qadhi Iyyadh said that this Hadith came in many forms, one of them being where the prophet says, "Last night I prayed as Allah had ordained, and I lay down on my side and I saw my lord, Allah, in his true form". There is no ambiguity in that statement because sometimes the dreamer sees something which it has no definition, or is a picture of another shape. This cannot be regarded as appropriate for the dreamer or the dream and has another rationale,

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many of which are discussed in the science of interpretation of dreams (p. 8, Volume 4).

Third: This was reported by the mother of believers (may Allah be pleased with her) and it is recorded in the True Hadiths of Albukhari (Sahih Bukhari). In it she denies that the prophet had seen almighty Allah on the night of the Mi'raj (ascendance) and this contradicts the opinion of Ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him). What she was referring to was seeing someone when awake, in the normal way, not seeing in a dream. Those who quote Aisha as an argument against seeing Allah in a dream have misunderstood her words.

Fourth: May Allah increase His bounty, I do not believe I have lied in my life. Those who are close to me know that, so how likely is it that I would say that something happened when it did not, especially about something so important. As Bukhari reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "If somebody claimed that he had seen something in his dream and in reality had not, on the day of judgment he will be ordered to join two barley seeds together and he will not be able to".

Fifth: I thank Allah that the dream as I recounted it was exactly as I said. This proves the truth of the dream and I found it good to tell about the dream as it was one of glad tidings.

Finally: The points which I have raised are more than enough to remove any ambiguity and doubt about this dream for anyone who seeks the truth. For anyone who is not seeking the truth but is driven by envy and hatred, and looking for a pretext to deny truth, we ask that Allah find a way for him to accept. Praise is due to Allah since by his bounty all good things derive. The mercy of Allah be upon our Prophet, through whom Allah has sealed the revelations and messages and told us that nothing else remains after the prophet except true dreams. (NOTE: This is a highly complex part of the text and has to be checked very carefully to ensure that the message and points intended are still clear in the revised text. On a purely stylistic point, it seems to me that something that I presume is so crucial (that is, a vision of almighty God), should be in the main body of the text rather than a footnote? Please review for your style preference though.)

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Coming back to your question, before my arrest I received information, in particular from my brother Nasih Mullah Salih, telling me that the Americans intended to arrest me and that I must take care. I received this information from various other sources, so to that extent I expected to be arrested. I sat down with them twice in Suleimani, and they also met our brothers in Kirkuk and Hawler. After the meeting in Suleimani, it was decided to make an appointment for me to see them again and after that to see Paul Bremer in Baghdad.

Although I feared arrest or something worse, I did not think it right to hide myself away. I did take precautions because I did not want to be arrested or attacked in our bases or other centres. On July 9, 2003, our brother from the Komal newspaper called me and told me that the Americans, through William Eagleton, had made an appointment to meet me in the Ashur Hotel in Dokan at 4:00PM, summer time. We were waiting for this meeting as we wanted them to fulfil their promises. Kak Tewfik, Kak Hajji Abdurrahman, Mamosta Dara Muhammad Amin and I, along with 10-15 security staff and drivers, were heading towards the designated meeting place and were just a few kilometres from our destination when we found on the other side of Qamchogah that obstacles and barriers had been placed in the road. There were armored vehicles parked on the road side and over the heights but I had no reason to believe that they were for us as we had an appointment. We wondered whether something had happened in the area or if they were waiting for something or perhaps looking for someone. We were in three cars and did not take any precautions because we thought we were guests and would offend if we brought a large quantity of weapons with us. The first car passed unhindered but the second car, in which I was sitting in the middle, was ordered to

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stop. I told the driver to comply in order to avoid trouble that might cause us to be late for the meeting. We were told to get out of the car, which we did, and I asked if any of them spoke Arabic. One of them came forward and said that he did. I explained that we had a meeting with American officials. He replied that he knew. I told him that we had been instructed to wait in the Ashur Hotel and I asked that he did not delay us. He then said that they had a few questions and told us to leave our weapons in the car and sit down outside. When I realized what was happening, I once again told him that we had a pre-arranged meeting. They handcuffed us, blindfolded us, and put black bags over our heads. Two helicopters were brought and our personal belongings, which they had put into named bags, were, I assume, placed in the aircraft. We were flown, as I learned later, to Mosul(1). We stayed there for a while, and then they took us to Baghdad Airport.

Q: During your arrest, how did the American soldiers treat you?

Ali Bapir: We must be fair, there were no beatings or any disrespect shown to us. They did tie our hands and this was painful as the handcuffs were put on in such a way that the more you moved, the tighter they became. You can still see the marks caused by the handcuffs on my wrists even today, but I personally did not witness any instances of violence against us or of verbal insults directed against us. I was, in their eyes, more dangerous than my brothers, so if nothing of that nature happened to me then I assume that it did not happen to them either. One thing I do have to mention is that in the helicopter if anyone raised his head to look around, the

(1) Mosul: also called Nineveh, is one of the most historical cities in northern Iraq. It lies 402 km north of Baghdad.

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Americans became angry. As we were tied up, whenever you wanted to stand up they helped because standing was difficult. I did not feel, however, that there was any disrespect shown or verbal abuse. The arrest in itself was a humiliation but I did not suffer any physical or verbal abuse but I am not certain if any of my brothers did.

Q: Mamosta, did they block the road?

Ali Bapir: There were numerous private cars parked on both sides of the road. It may be that some of the owners knew us. That is possible, but after they put the black plastic bags over our heads, we did not know who was who.

Q: When they brought the two helicopters did they separate you?

Ali Bapir: No, we, that is Mamosta Dara, Kak Tewfik, Hajji Abdul Rahman and I, along 4 or 5 others, were put in one helicopter and the rest taken in the other.

Q: Coincidently, we went to one institution, where someone said that one private car had mistakenly come between Mamosta Ali and his accompanying convoy and that Mamosta Ali at that very trying time had told the Americans that the car was not part of the group. The person said that Mamosta made it clear that the driver did not have anything to do with him. Is that true?

Ali Bapir: Yes, I told the Americans that he was not with us and that it was unfair to involve him. I told them that the driver was telling the truth. They still arrested him but he was released later.

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Q: Who were those people you were supposed to meet in the Ashur hotel?

Ali Bapir: The two that we had met previously in Suleimani, Ambassador William Eagleton and Bill Stewart. They said that they would set up some appointments for us, initially with a number of officers and that then we would meet with them again in Baghdad.

I thought that our meeting with those officers would be in preparation for the meeting in Baghdad, but they did not mention the names of those we were to meet.

When the Americans contacted our brothers in the Komal newspaper(1), they told them about the meeting and claimed that they were speaking on behalf of William Eagleton and had been appointed by him to meet us.

Q: Previously, Americans and the Islamic Group had meetings. Based on those meetings, at what level, in your opinion, was the Islamic Group's relationship with the Americans at that time?

Ali Bapir: I cannot determine to what extent and to what level the relationship was at that time. The important thing is that those brothers who were with me had permission from them to carry weapons and I had permission to carry my pistol. We took into consideration that they were not happy with us having guns and we did not really understand how they viewed our relationship. However, we asked them to sit down together with us to reach a mutual understanding and find out who we really are. It was not a ruse; we really wanted

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(1) The Komal newspaper: a weekly newspaper and the mouthpiece of the Islamic Group; 500 issues were published weekly.

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them to know us as we know ourselves. I am prepared to take any consequences stemming from my beliefs but am far from happy to pay a price for something that I do not believe in or have not done, or worse, something that someone else has fabricated about me or forced upon me. It was important, therefore, that they knew us for what we truly were, what we stood for. In those two meetings, attended by our brothers in Kirkuk and in other places, we clarified Islamic Group policy, we outlined our program and our perceptions of our relationship with, and opinions of, the US. We expressed our position frankly and made it clear that we did not regard the US as an enemy although we did not approve of its occupation of Iraq. We were explicit in separating our disquiet at US involvement in Iraq and the fact that we did not believe the US had come to fight against us, so we did not regard the Americans as enemies. We repeated our satisfaction that the regime had collapsed as this was in our interests and we regarded its fall as a blessing from our God. However, we could not be content that the US had come here without our agreement and without consulting us before hand. Neither were we happy that the invasion had taken place without the agreement of the United Nations or the international community as a whole, though given the fact that the Americans did not listen to the rest of the world it is no surprise that they were not interested in what we had to say.

Q: Mamosta, how was your morale and that of your brothers during this time?

Ali Bapir: It is not comfortable talking about yourself! You should ask other brothers, may Allah increase His blessing upon them. I was unhappy with prison, as I had never been imprisoned in my entire life, had always lived honourably,

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and I had never been detained; it was very hard for me. This was my first trial, I was very unhappy but that does not mean I was frightened by the prison. I was not frightened at that very difficult time, or later when I was tortured. I recited the Quran and prayed. What I did not think about, at least not much, was death. If someone has no fear of death, he does not fear other things.

At that time, when they took us, I remember thinking that they were tying my hands more tightly than the others. The three or four who were guarding me told me that I was the leader. Although I was unhappy, I never allowed imprisonment or my unhappiness to make me miss any of my prayers. I never said one word that would have shown weakness. I constantly told them that I had been arrested by mistake and that they had been misled. Sometimes members of what I believe were the security services asked how I was.

Q: Was this in the helicopter?

Ali Bapir: No, later when they brought us down from the plane. One of these men asked if I was "OK?" I replied that I was fine. He asked me if I was Ali Bapir and I replied that I was. He smiled at me and I told him that

my arrest was a mistake which he would regret later. He asked me why he would he regret it and I replied because my arrest was an error. He told me to be quiet.

Q: Was that in Mosul or in Baghdad?

Ali Bapir: In Mosul Airport, immediately after we were brought out of the aircraft. A man, without asking anyone else, removed the black bag over my head and asked me to identify myself.

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Q: Did you feel that this Arab was Iraqi?

Ali Bapir: It all happened so quickly, I could not work out who he was but it appeared that he had seen a picture of me since even though he did not initially see me close up, he recognized me.

Q: From the time they arrested you until you arrived in Mosul, was the black plastic bag over your head the whole time?

Ali Bapir: Yes, and my hands were tied too.

Q: How long was that?

Ali Bapir: I guess it was before 4:00 PM in the afternoon until before dawn in the middle of night. I say this because when they dropped us in Mosul it was late at night. I said Maghreb and Isha with my hands tied together. I could not move my body. We stayed there until very late then they brought a plane and transported us. I said to the others that we might be going to Guantanamo Bay. Later, they dropped us off but I did not know at that time where as our eyes were covered. We thought it was Baghdad Airport where they kept us for a while. Some of our brothers went to the washroom and the Americans had to untie their belts. I asked them if they would untie my hands so that I could make ablution. They refused, and I refused to use the facilities. I was very upset because we had been in the transport for between 8 to 10 hours and even when we landed we were not able to visit a toilet or untie our hands so that we could pray. Eventually, when we reached our final destination, I was asked why I had not visited a toilet earlier and only then were my hands untied. The interrogations then began. There were 5 or 6 who surrounded us and interrogated us separately.

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Q: Were any of those involved in your arrest known to you? Were there any Kurds amongst them?

Ali Bapir: I did not see any of them clearly. All of those who guarded us were Americans and all wore American army uniforms. I did not recognize any of them. I was in the middle of the car but I felt that they knew me. Someone must have told them which car I was in because the first car in our convoy passed through unhindered and it was only when the car in which I was travelling in approached that they stopped us. I felt right away that they knew where to look and that is why they stopped the car I was in. I heard later that they had spies working for them but I do not have any precise details.

Q: At that time did anyone mention your name?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they wrote my name down.

Q: Before you were arrested did you say that you expected this to happen?

Ali Bapir: I expected it but not in the way it happened because before that, when I was in Suleimani, sometimes I did not sleep in my home, I went somewhere else. I did not expect them to invite me to a meeting and then arrest me.

Q: Mamosta, you have said that you were not sleeping at your home at this time. My question is, did you have information that you were about to be arrested? Did you take any steps to protect yourself? Did you consider leaving the country?

Ali Bapir: No, I did not think of that. How can a man leave his people? If I was considering that, I would first of all have had to advise my people to hide themselves, after clos-

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ing down all our bases. I had it in my mind that there was the possibility that all these rumours about my impending arrest might be false. Yes, I was waiting to be arrested but I thought it inappropriate to hide myself away. I would only have hidden if my people were also doing so. It is not right that an Imam hides himself and leaves his Ummah, the community, by itself. I felt very strongly that such behavior would be totally inappropriate.

Q: At the time of your arrest, were your guards armed and did you tell them not to resist?

Ali Bapir: I told them that the Americans were not looking for us, so I told them not to do anything or even move. When they approached us and asked if I was the leader, I replied that I was in charge and that I had a meeting with American officials. I asked them to let us move on but they told us to leave our weapons in the car as they wanted to ask a few questions. The one who approached me spoke in Arabic and gave me the impression that the Americans were not looking for us. I do not recall the whole conversation but what is important is that he led us to believe that we were not the target of their search and therefore there was no need for us to consider that we were in danger or that we needed to defend ourselves. Surrounded as we were by tanks and armored vehicles, we were in no position to think of fighting.

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Q: You were in Kurdistan and within the jurisdiction of the Kurdistan Regional Government when you were ambushed and arrested. How do you account for that? Who do you believe bears responsibility for this event, including the ambush? Did you believe that there was someone behind it all? Did the Americans respect the sovereignty of Kurdistan?

Ali Bapir: If I believed that the Americans had any respect for the Kurdish administration and that they believed that the Kurds had sovereignty over their own land, I would have assumed that, since I was arrested in a PUK controlled area, they were complicit. However, since the US has no regard for anyone or anything, first and foremost, I accuse the US for my arrest because I know that the US does not respect anything other than its own policies and interests. I feel it is unfair to blame those who had no control and were both powerless and helpless. The Kurdish political leadership and officials who came to console me said that if they had been arrested they would feel as I did. Later it seems that Dr. Mushin Abdulhamid[1], who was acting on behalf of the Iraqi president, was also arrested.

I understand the circumstances surrounding my arrest and know that the US respects no one. An American soldier can take whatever action he likes against anyone. I blame the US for my arrest and I think it is unfair to blame those who were powerless to prevent it.

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(1) Muhsin Abdulhamid: born in 1937 in Kirkuk. He was from a Kurdish family and was one of the most prominent figures of the Iraqi Islamic Party. He was the head of the Shura Council of the Islamic Party and returned to Iraq upon the invasion of Iraq by US troops in 2003.

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Yes, there may be some despicable individuals who acted out of personal interest and cooperated with the Americans but as I said in the press conference which I held following my release, it was the US that arrested me and released me. From the time of my arrest, through the torture period and throughout my 22 months in captivity, I saw only Americans. I saw no one else involved in my case.

Q: Up until now, in regard to this point, have you any documentary evidence that proves that the Americans had other people with them?

Ali Bapir: No, but the Americans talked about individuals and said that this or that political faction had cooperated with them and had denounced me. They claimed that these people had given them the information that had led to my arrest. I told them that as far as I was concerned only they had been involved. If someone did do as they said then presumably they would have done so only for money and personal gain.

Q: Mamosta, after your arrest we discussed the situation with the Americans in Kurdistan where, at that time, Colonel Harry Shout and his deputy, Major Bullins, were in command. We asked them about your arrest and were told by them that they had no knowledge of the incident. They claimed that they had no authority to take such action. Were those who arrested you made up only of American military personnel or were there Security Forces also present? How many people do you estimate were there?

Ali Bapir: I cannot guess how many people were there. The only thing that I know is that there were armored vehicles and soldiers. Later, after my arrest, I heard the noise of

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helicopters coming and then hovering. Two helicopters came for us. Later, my brother Ibrahim and the others with me confirmed that two helicopters were there. I cannot tell you how many people in total were there. It may be that other brothers who looked around know more. As regards the type of forces present, initially we saw only military personnel but at Mosul Airport a man in civilian dress was present. I knew he was in the intelligence services but I do not know whether he was with the CIA or some other security service. Those who interrogated us were all civilians but they did not tell us who they were. It appeared that they were intelligence service personnel. What is important is that they were Americans. They did not say that they were members of this organization or that department but they were American. I do not know who they reported to but I simply ask how a force from Baghdad had the right to arrest a person in Kurdistan without acknowledging that they had forces in Kurdistan?

Q: So this was what they said?

Ali Bapir: They were not organized and were messy. They had stationed a force in Kurdistan. This force must have had information and the authority to take action. Presumably they had to inform those operating in Kurdistan otherwise it would be a total mess. I do not know, the important thing is that Americans arrested me.

Q: Mamosta, you are a leader of a militant Islamic party. How do you explain your imprisonment? What did you feel about your arrest?

Ali Bapir: Initially, I felt surprised that the US, a superpower state that claims to protect human rights, calls for a new world order, and propagates the values it claims to hold

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could do such a thing. I said this during my interrogations. I was surprised that I had been arrested in such an uncivilized manner. If you compare my speeches, before and after I spoke with William Eagleton, and those during and after the attack, you will find them to be the same. What I said was consistent. It was strange for me, and the fact that American democracy could behave in such a way was both unexpected and unbelievable. I pity the Kurdish people. We have had elections for several years, a parliament, and there is a government and an administration. I am merely a Kurd without any official position living in my country and yet a foreign army was able, without justification, to ambush me without reference to anyone else. How could this happen? The answer is because our people are either complacent or unaware of what is happening in our country. There is an Arab proverb that says that if you do not know of a disaster you cannot know how great the disaster is. So they were either aware of what was happening, in which case the question is why did they accept this treatment of comrades with whom they had agreements, had sat with, and with whom they had fought against the Ba'ath regime? We had made sacrifices together and many of our followers had been martyred together. If they were unaware of the situation then they deserve pity, since clearly if a group of American gangsters can come and arrest an apolitical Kurd, someone who preaches sermons, a writer, a teacher and a Peshmerga, without having any evidence against him, as later admitted by the Americans, then that leadership is not worthy of respect.

I have pity also for the Islamic Group which was wronged and yet remained silent, for whatever reason. Some may think that the organization was helpless but I disagree. In my opinion, we had the power to do something similar to

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what Ansar and others did. We could have acted as others did. We had fought before. I have pity for the Islamic Group and the way they were portrayed to the Americans. Why did the political leadership not defend the Islamic Group, since it had inherited the glories and struggles of the Islamic Movement, and had martyrs murdered in the Ba'athist prisons and on the battle front? Why should we not be defended?

In my life, may Allah increase his bounty, I had never previously seen humiliation or subjugation, and consequently, this was a great trial for me. It lay very heavily on my heart; perhaps Allah wanted to strengthen me, otherwise my heart would have stopped entirely. I would rather have died a hundred times than be arrested once. I was asked if I had been humiliated. The arrest and imprisonment was the greatest humiliation, not the conditions of my imprisonment as such. It was very hard. I believe in my life I have undergone many trials but this one was the hardest of all, particularly the arrest. I thought I was about to die from grief. I did not fear death. I would have preferred to have been shot a hundred times rather than endure that moment.

Q: Was this particularly so because from your youth you had lived an honourable lifestyle?

Ali Bapir: I will tell you a story. I was in the college of Fiqh in Najaf[1]. In the second year, I was told to join the People's Army. I refused but believe me, all of my friends who were part of the PUK and KDP organizations, did join. They believed that I was crazy and asked me about my decision and said that I would be thrown out of college. I said that I could not join the People's Army or the Student's Union.

(1) Najaf: a city in the south of Iraq city, lying near to the historical city of Kofah, 140 kms south of Baghdad and 80 km from Karbala city.

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Not only that but in the Grade Twelve exams of the Islamic Institute in Suleimani students in the Dictation Exam had to write on two topics. One of them was to write a piece against Khumeiny and the other was to write one in praise of Saddam. I did not believe either of the propositions in those two dictation topics. I did not see in what way the disparagement of the first or the praise being given to the second could be true. There were thirty marks available on that exam. Allah knows I did not complete the task and I lost thirty marks, I think I received sixty and something, perhaps sixty eight. Later, my friends asked me why I had not given an answer and I replied that I could not write something that I did not believe in, They were surprised, may Allah increase his bounty, I was like that all my life. I have always written and acted according to what I believed in.

God almighty made me as I am from when I was very little, a child. Children in the neighborhood formed a football team and they made me their captain. Then when I grew up, as you can see, God created circumstances in such a way that I led even older brothers like Mamosta Hassan Babakr. Many were older than me, many had more experience than me, but nonetheless, God almighty made the situation for me as I have described. From the beginning my situation was like that, I took leadership and instruction roles and so had never been imprisoned, subjected to violence, or been handcuffed or anything like that. That is why it was very difficult for me. For my whole adult life during the era of the Ba'athist regime, I was in hiding. I told the Americans that, and they said that one of the questions they had for me was about my relationship with the regime. I told them that my life during the regime era had been spent in hiding but they had brought

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me as a prisoner to Baghdad which I had not seen for the last 21 years. They asked me why I had not visited the capital and I told them to ask people in Kurdistan who would confirm that during the regime I had been in hiding. For any human being who had undergone such a situation, the trauma of imprisonment would have been psychologically distressing.

Q: Now that you are free, when you pass Qamchugha, what do you remember?

Ali Bapir: I swear by God that whenever I see the place I am saddened and remember all the things that I have told you about American credibility with regard to democracy, human rights, and all the other slogans they proclaim. I also remember the helplessness of my nation, the oppression suffered by the Islamic Group and my own damaged psychological state. I remember all of that whenever I see the place. God knows, I do not ever want to see it again. Sometimes our brothers unwittingly ask me,"Was it here?" when we pass it, and that stirs up all the emotions again.

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TOPIC 3 THE PRISON, THE PRISONERS, THE TREATMENT AND AQUAINTANCES

13/06/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Mamosta, after your arrest to which prison were you sent? How many others were you imprisoned with? How long was it before you were sent to Cropper Prison at Baghdad Airport?

Ali Bapir: In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Merciful, after they handcuffed us near the village of Qamchugha, they took us by helicopter to a prison in Mosul. We remained there until the Isha prayer time. They kept us in the sun. I combined and shortened two prayers, Maghrib and Isha. Later, they transferred us by air, though I do not know the type of aircraft used as we were blindfolded, to what appeared to be Baghdad, near Camp Cropper. We were then taken to another place near Camp Cropper where I stayed for 9 days. During those 9 days there were interrogations and torture. After 9 days, they separated us and put us in different vehicles. They had already separated me from my brothers, although I did occasionally see them in their cells near to where I was being questioned. I was taken on a journey by car of perhaps 20 minutes to half an hour until we reached

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Cropper Prison, which appeared to be near the airport. Mamosta Tofieq, Mamosta Dara, Hajji Abdurrahman and some of our peshmargas were with me. Our hands and feet were bound very tightly and when we arrived we asked to be untied, which they did, and I made my ablutions immediately. They started their interrogation of me, obviously separated from the others, and from that point the interrogations continued unabated.

It was like that for the 9 days I was there; I could not tell day from night because the electric lights were all on all the time and there was no gap through which you could tell what time of day it was. Inside the room, the light was always on. I asked about prayer times but they would not tell me, so I estimated as best I could the time at which to say them: "And Allah determines [the extent of] the night and the day. He has known that you [Muslims] will not be able to do it [pray the whole night], and has turned to you in forgiveness"(Muzzammil:20). The important thing is I knew there had to be both day and night and I said the obligatory prayers 5 times as required.

After 9 days they transferred me again. I was put in a car by myself. My hands were placed in a ring of some kind that had my name, address and the number 117 on it. I was taken to a hall sometime before dawn and was very tired and thirsty. I was greeted when I arrived by people in the hall that I did not know. Some of them asked me who I was and others stood up for the dawn prayer. I told them who I was and what my situation was and asked who they were. There were ministers and members of the Revolutionary Command Council, including the Minister of Endowment for the Ba'athist regime and two or three others. I stayed there until

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evening. It was obvious that the others had been in the hall for some time. On the evening of the tenth day I was put in solitary confinement and I remained in solitary confinement until my release. I was held in cell 42, Division 7, for 90 days and then they sent me to another one. Again, I was held in solitary confinement, this time in cell 42, Division 5. I stayed there for 40 days. I was then transferred once again to cell 40 but still in Division 5 for the remaining 519 days of my imprisonment. In total, I was held for 659 days. The breakdown of my incarceration from my arrest to my release was: 9 days in one place, 1 day in another, making a total of 10 days; then 90 days in one, making a total of 100 days; 40 days in my penultimate cell, making 140 which, if deducted from the overall total of 659, leaves 519 days. I was left in solitary confinement for 519 days in one cell, 40 days in one and 90 days another, all in solitary confinement. This means that with the exception of those 10 days at the beginning, I was held for 649 days in solitary confinement.

Q: Before we go in to the details about the prisons, do you know where the name "Cropper" came from?

Ali Bapir: I did not know at the time but some of the prisoners who were officials in the previous regime said Cropper was the name of a famous American from New York who had died on September 11, 2001. The camp was named after him.

Q: Can you describe the cells in which you were kept in solitary confinement?

Ali Bapir: Each of the three cells in which I was held were basically the same. Each was approximately 2.5 by 2.5 meters. The ceiling was high enough that no one would be able

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to reach it. The walls were made of bare concrete and gypsum but later were painted. In the beginning, the rooms were very dark but after they painted them, when sunlight came through to the cell or when they put on a light, the room became a little brighter. This description is of the one I stayed in for 90 days rather than the one I stayed in for 40 days. The one that I stayed in for 90 days did not have any facilities. Between once and three times a day we were taken to a washroom. On occasion we had to use a bottle or a bucket to urinate or defecate in. I was very upset by that. When I could, I used the washroom to answer calls of nature. Later, when they moved me to Division 5, the cell had washroom in it. I was then able to wash my clothes. Before being moved, washing clothes was very hard because either they would not allow us to do our washing or when they did we had to do it very quickly. It appears that going to the washroom, eating, drinking, cleaning and other matters all had to be carried out in set stages.

Q: How many inmates could Camp Cropper house? Was it used for any specific category of prisoner?

Ali Bapir: My guess would be that the Cropper prison housed between 100 and 150 inmates. It could accommodate approximately 100 prisoners in solitary confinement and, in addition, had two halls that could take 10 inmates. Those who were imprisoned in this facility were all of high rank. One or two were members of the previous regime, administrative and political personnel, members of the Revolutionary Command Council, members of the Regional Command Council, ministers, military leaders, members of the intelligence services and Saddam's relatives.

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The prison was surrounded by four walls. On each side there were towers and guards with guns in each one. The perimeter was guarded by barbed wire which was 2 meters high. While I was there they dug 4 to 5 ditches, though first they heightened the fence using sacks of sand, then added more wire. In addition to that, the prison was in the middle of a military camp. According to my information, several thousand soldiers were based there. The area was very sandy and when the wind blew the cells were filled with dust, sand and dirt. It was impossible to keep them clean. In addition, they lay small stones on the ground so that when the sun heated them, they became extremely hot. We were not allowed out except at the designated exercise period. We were confined to our cells for the rest of the time. The prison was surrounded by towers and barbed wire and guarded by security guards every second of the day and night.

Q: Was this building a prison in Saddam's era?

Ali Bapir: No, I asked the Ba'athists there and they said that it had been a barracks for Saddam Hussein's guard, but the Americans converted it to provide accommodation for those they wished to place in solitary confinement. We were there when they brought workers to continue the renovations.

Q: We heard that American bases in Baghdad Airport faced daily attacks. Were you aware of those attacks?

Ali Bapir: Yes, on many occasions those attacks came close to us. One day we were in the exercise yard where we were permitted to exercise and walk when suddenly we heard a considerable amount of gunfire. RBGs and small arms being used in the attack. One of the bullets hit my door. When the

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shooting started the Americans initiated a lockdown, which meant we all had to go back to our cells. Everyone did so but it seemed as if there was an RBJ battle going on near us. The guards came down from their towers fearful of stray bullets and snipers. The battle was very close to us and after half an hour the attackers retreated. Someone asked the guards if any of the attackers had been killed and was told that none had, nor had any of the defenders. I have no way of knowing whether this was true or not but they said that the attackers had not left any bodies behind, nor were there any signs of blood. On some days we could hear the sound of artillery fire near to us in the military base. Dust and debris flew over us, especially towards the end of a barrage. Our guards made us wear the same metal helmets they did and also gave us armor to put on even though we were in our cells. We had to wear this equipment for our own safety, we were told, if the Camp was on alert or if there was fighting in Fallujah, Abu Ghreb or any other area nearby. They regarded the provision of this equipment as in some way safeguarding our human rights!

Q: Were any of the prisoners killed or wounded?

Ali Bapir: None of us, but it is said that tens of our brothers imprisoned in Abu Ghreb and in other places were. We were less in number but no one was killed or wounded. Four artillery shells would have easily taken out half of us. The building was such that we were concerned that any artillery or 120 mortar attacks would destroy it.

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Q: When you were in solitary confinement which activities were you permitted? What were the activities you were not permitted? Did they allow you to go outside the prison for exercise and to mix with others?

Ali Bapir: I need to clarify this properly …

Yes…

Ali Bapir: I do not know what happened before I arrived but in the initial phases of my imprisonment, by that I mean the three months, the 90 days I mentioned, followed by the three month period, we were allowed to exercise for two half hour time slots, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. 23 hours in the cell and 2 half hours outside. In those 2 half hours we were not supposed to speak or greet our friends. To be fair, it all depended on the guards' mood. Some guards overlooked the order and allowed us to talk to each other while others threatened to deprive us of our exercise time and return us to our cells if we spoke. Each division had 7 prisoners and if one prisoner from the division disobeyed an instruction the entire group was punished and everyone sent back to the cells and lost the half hour outside. For that first 4 to 5 months the exercise periods consisted of 2 half hours, then they made it 2 hours in total, 1 hour at night and 1 hour during the day or 1 hour in the morning and 1 hour in the afternoon. We were not allowed to talk in either the two half hours, or two one hour exercise periods, when we were allowed out of our cells, not even to say "hello".

With regard to being taken to the washroom, this was usually allowed 2 or 3 times per day with the minimum being once and the maximum 3 times. If anyone had to urinate at other times while in his cell, he had to empty his bottle and

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wash it out when he visited the washroom and then bring it back with him to his cell. Anything else had to be done in a bucket which, again, had to be taken to the washroom when you could, emptied, cleaned and brought back.

In regard to using the bathroom, this was permitted twice a week. You had to wash yourself and your clothes in 10 minutes. They constantly hurried us along and told us to be quiet; no one was allowed to speak. Everything had to be done in 10 minutes. If you had not finished in the allotted time it did not matter, you still had to leave the bathroom even if you were covered in soap suds. They simply said that time was up. In the beginning they were very harsh with us but later we were allowed three visits to the bathroom and they extended the time to 15 minutes, sometimes 20. The nicest guards let us stay up to half an hour and enabled us to relax a little.

Q: Did you have special uniforms? How often were you allowed to change your clothes? What were your clothes like?

Ali Bapir: In the beginning with regard to clothes, I had a terrible time. I had one thin pair of pajamas. My Kurdish clothes were hot as it was summer. They took them away from me and said they would stamp them with the letters CI, for civilian inmate. They said they would store them and I pointed out that if I was released, as I would only have these Kurdish clothes if they had been stamped in the way they intended, it would not be appropriate to be seen in this way in public. I told them to take my clothes to the store so I ended up with thin pajamas. I felt the cold as the area was desert and it was very cold at night and hot during the day. This is the normal weather for any desert. I had a shirt which

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was torn while being tortured in prison. I had a T-shirt; it too was torn. I threw it away. I had only one shirt and nothing else, and they did not provide anything else. Then, at some point, they gave me a T-shirt and underwear. I did not have a sponge so I used my underwear as a bath sponge and I wore the T-shirt until it was torn. One of the inmates sympathised with me and offered a spare dishdasha that he had. I accepted the offer gratefully. Whenever the T-shirt became dirty I washed it in the bathroom and wore it again immediately afterwards. I had to wear the T-shirt while it was still wet. After he had given me that dishdasha I was able to rotate. Whenever the T-shirt became dirty I washed it and wore the dishdasha, and then whenever the dishdasha was dirty, I washed that and wore the T-shirt.

Q: Who gave you the dishdasha?

Samir Omar An-Najim. He was the first one who sat with Mullah Mustafa Barzani and was the head of a team delegated to negotiate at the beginning of 1970, or possibly before 1970. I asked Kak Masud about this and he confirmed that he had held discussions with Mullah Mustafa Barzani. After approximately a year, I do not remember exactly, they gave us a uniform. They called it a jump suit; it was a yellow suit like those used at Guantanamo. The first suit had been blue but this was taken from us as they said that if we escaped we would not be easily identified in them. So they gave us that yellow one in order to be seen from a distance. They then gave us a second one and told us that when one became dirty then we should wear the other. We felt we had become clothes millionaires! They gave us towels. Everyone was given a towel, soap, a tooth brush, tooth paste, a shaving set and materials for keeping clean. They gave us those things and, as I have said, a T-shirt and the other items I have mentioned.

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Q: Did you have to wash these clothes or were they washed for you?

Ali Bapir: No, no one was treated better than anyone else, there was no Agha amongst us. Everyone had to do his own washing and clean his own cell. How you chose to do that was up to you. Not only that, but we were also ordered to clean the exercise yard. We even had to pick up the cigarette ends thrown away by the guards. If anyone refused to pick them up he was told that as he did not need exercise he should return to his cell. To avoid being deprived of exercise and much needed fresh air many looked for the remnants of cigarettes to pick up to show the guards that they were keeping the area clean and so deserved to remain outside.

Q: So, was exercise taken as a group?

Ali Bapir: No, they ordered us to leave our cells and go to a hall but we were not allowed to speak to one another. Each person had to be between 5 and 10 meters away from their neighbor. You were not allowed to talk and the guards stood on either side of you. Two guards stood about 10 meters away from the prisoners but there were also another two walking around the perimeter of the building and others standing at each side. If anyone uttered a word, a guard would shout at him once or twice and if that did not work the person talking was told to go back to his cell.

Q: What food and drinks were brought to you in prison?

Ali Bapir: Our food was in packages or in cans. It was American food and what we ate was meant to be the same as they ate. However, they prepared different food for themselves and we had to watch them. They gave us canned food

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until the prisoners started complaining and we told them that we were literally sick of this food which was all canned and some of which was beyond its expiry date. We asked for fresh produce. Sometimes there was pork or wine in the food we were given. After our protests we were given one fresh meal a day, which was later increased to twice a day, but at least one meal a day was made up of canned food.

Q: What kind of food was it?

Ali Bapir: Food was canned lamb and chicken, beans and vegetables, all of which were mixed and cooked together. That was our food, the preserved kind you get in cans.

Q: Did they treat you differently in the month of Ramadan, by providing the proper type of food for predawn and for breaking your fast? Could you ask for any special food?

Ali Bapir: There was never any special food. Whatever they brought for you was what you had to eat. You could not say that you would eat this and not that, or anything like that. You had to eat whatever was available so you ate it or left it.

With regard to the month of Ramadan, for the first Ramadan they made no provision for us and we protested. When the Red Cross visited, we raised the issue and told them that the Americans had no respect for the sanctity of the month of Ramadan and consequently we had to eat cold food predawn and in the evening. A person could be freezing in his cell but all he had to eat and drink was cold. We said that at least one of the meals must be hot or, alternatively, we should be allowed to cook our own food. They had taken the heaters out of our cells but after our complaint they brought them back. We were able to warm the canned food. Occasionally

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they brought predawn meals such as boiled or fried eggs. That was for the predawn meal. As for the breaking fast meal, there was chicken and rice with soup. Obviously they cooked the food the American way. It was good, since it was hot. It made a big difference, compared to the cold, canned or packet preserved food.

Q: With regard to quantity, was there enough?

Ali Bapir: I believe that varied from one person to another. For me, it was enough and I gave any extra I did not eat to others because for half of my time of imprisonment I fasted. There were people for whom the food was insufficient and who were very pleased if I gave them any of mine.

Q: With regard to the prohibition against talking with each other or greeting each other, did this continue until the day of your release?

Ali Bapir: No, it lasted until 1 year before my release; I do not say the day of freedom because I always regarded myself as a free person and not a slave.

Q: We will discuss that in another topic...

Ali Bapir: One year before my release they gave a division of us, that is 7, the opportunity to sit and talk together. They brought us tables and chairs and at exercise time we could sit together if we wished. A few months, approximately, before my release they allowed the prisoners in 3 divisions, a total of 21, to sit together. From then on, since they let us sit together, I started collective prayers. I called adhan from my cell from the first day of my imprisonment. If we were outside, I went to the highest spot available and called adhan from there for the entire camp. If I was inside the cell, I opened the window.

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Q: What was it like the first time when you called adhan and what happened?

Ali Bapir: From the beginning I called adhan but only loud enough for ourselves so as to avoid any confrontation. There was no reaction. The Americans found it odd; for example, on one occasion while I was chanting ALLAHU AKBAR loudly, a female guard came running asking what had happened and what I was doing. I continued the adhan without stopping and she called for help, saying that something must be wrong with me. She thought I was crying or shouting and I was asked again if there was anything wrong with me. I smiled at them, and they realized that there was nothing wrong, I gestured to them that I was fine and told them that I was calling the faithful to prayer. It appeared strange to them, and was the first time they had heard the adhan. I had called the adhan right from the beginning. We started praying collectively from the time they allowed the 3 divisions to sit together. I also started Friday prayers.

Q: During these 2 months in prison, particularly in the last stage, a number of letters were sent to your wife and to your family through the Red Cross. How do you evaluate its role?

Ali Bapir: Let me tell you that for the first 7 months the Americans did not pass on any letter from home. They kept all my letters. I remonstrated with them, pointing out that everyone receives letters and asked why there were none for me. They did not have any answer. I made enquiries with the prison administration. For a full year I did not have the chance to see or even call my family. For the sake of accuracy I have to say that some of the leaders of the previous regime were allowed to do so.

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With regard to the exchange of letters, our only means was through the Red Cross. I thanked them every time they came and on my release I visited them and invited them to my home. I asked them to pass on my thanks to their friends because they were the only line of communication open to me. I remember that one day, after about 7 months, I became very angry with the prison administrators and asked them why I was not receiving any letters. I asked them if this meant that none of my family were still alive. I also asked if my letters to my family had been delivered because if so I did not understand why there had been no response. I stopped writing letters for 2 to 3 months. My friends in prison asked me why I was not writing letters anymore and I answered that it was because I was not receiving any replies so there did not seem much point. If my letters were not delivered and any replies were kept from me, it seemed a waste of time carrying on.

One day, during an interrogation, I became angry with the interrogator and told him that here he was talking about democracy and human rights but I did not even have the right to know what had happened to my family, my children, my friends and my relatives. I knew nothing about them and had not had a letter from them. I was sent back to my cell and they said they would think the matter over. I complied and was returned to my cell accompanied by one or two guards. I was in my cell when an interrogator came in and brought me my letters, ten in all. Many were from so long ago that they were to all intents and purposes useless in terms of current information but they were still very welcome. I asked why they had been held back and was told that the decision had been taken by a previous interrogator. From then on some letters did not get through to me but others did, usually in bundles.

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In reality, the Red Cross played a very positive role in our situation. Some criticized them but I had nothing but respect for what they did and genuinely thanked them for their efforts on our behalf. I suggested to them that they had more power to influence the Americans than they thought. They did try to persuade the Americans to act differently and presented our case but they believed that it was the Americans who had the real power and theirs was very limited. We pointed out that under the Geneva Accord anyone (whether civilian or military who was arrested) had rights and we wanted to know what our rights were in our situation. They agreed and said that they had brought the issue up with the Americans but that they did not have the power to force the Americans to comply with the Accord. It reached the stage that one day I put the Red Cross on the spot by reminding them that according to agreements, now that a year had passed since the occupation of Iraq, our cases should be dealt with. The government was in operation and we should either be handed over to the Iraqi government or released. They said that the Americans had a different interpretation of this agreement. I enquired whether the Red Cross interpretation or the American would be applied. They said that it would be that of the Americans and I responded, saying that this was against all logic, it was irrational. They were puzzled by my position and I argued that because the Red Cross was, in effect, the guardian of the Geneva Accords, which they acknowledged, then they should be the arbitrators of any interpretation of their terms. From my viewpoint, if that was not the case, and individual states like the US or the UK could determine their own version, then the whole Accord was rendered utterly useless. They agreed that this was the case but still contended that there was nothing they could do. I told them that their

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interpretation was that of the weaker party while that of the US was of the stronger party and hence, in this situation, the logic of power prevailed and not the power of logic. They agreed with all that I said but insisted that if they went too far in opposing the US then the end result would be that they would be prevented from delivering and sending letters for us. The Americans were already asking them what was happening and what points we were raising with them. The Red Cross told us that they had been threatened that if they divulged any of our complaints outside the camp then they would be denied access to us and for that reason they felt they could not say anything.

Q: Were the Red Cross members Arabs or foreigners?

Ali Bapir: They were foreigners but had Arabs with them: Lebanese, Egyptians, and Moroccans. I became friends with many of them. I was always very pleased to see them when they visited and I made them as welcome as I could in the situation, giving them drinks of water, juice or tea. I treated them as you would guests and gave them the respect due to them. They remarked that while others often treated them very badly, as if their imprisonment was somehow the Red Cross' fault, and would not talk to them, I did not take that stance. When they asked me how I was, I consistently re-assured them that I was fine and this seemed to please them. I read them verses from the Quran and they often said that they enjoyed meeting me, in contrast to their experiences with others whom they regarded as being extremely depressed. I told them that many of the prisoners were sick and others were in despair, while a few felt regret for what had happened or what they had done. My case was very different. First of all, I did not have any feelings of guilt. Second, I felt

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that I was just at the beginning of my work while many of the others were at the end of theirs. I was just starting out and I had hope. This meant that my spiritual state was in a more positive condition than many of the others. The result was that many of those from the Red Cross with whom I talked about Islam and the Prophets' messages (Peace be upon them), even the Christians amongst them, enjoyed our discussions. I also talked to them about day to day things as well as what commonalities there were between various religions. I stressed my belief that all religious views had to be respected. According to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) if anyone does you a kindness then you must reciprocate or, if that is not possible, then your benefactor should be thanked. This injunction is a religious obligation.

In reality the Red Cross, as an organization, played a very positive role and tried hard. They were frustrated by the Americans and were constantly quarreling with them. I reminded them when I was in their office Hawler that whenever they visited us the Americans invariably treated us better, providing better food or giving us new clothes. We always knew when the Red Cross were due to visit as, in addition to the food or clothes, the attitude of the guards to us changed. That change might result in increased exercise periods or extra time in the bathroom. When the Red Cross left, for a time conditions were often better for us, at least for a short while. We knew that these changes stemmed from the rows that the Red Cross had with the Americans on our behalf. When I told the Red Cross this, they seemed pleased that they did have some impact on helping to improve our lot. I, and indeed many others, still have a sense of gratitude for the efforts of the Red Cross and we still thank them profusely. While many of us valued their work, however, some did

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not and refused to see them and often expressed their anger towards them. I did not agree with that viewpoint. A man has only so much power and the Red Cross as a humanitarian organization believed that it had limited power and that if they exceeded the limits set by the Americans then they would be prevented from providing any help at all. They saw themselves as essentially powerless in the face of overwhelming American might which was so great that no organization or state had any power over them.

On many occasions when the Red Cross visited, some sat with me for over an hour, while others might spend 20 minutes or half an hour with me. I think they talked with me for so long and so often because together we created a psychological atmosphere that was conducive to discussion. There was no blame; I did not see the point of blaming those who did not have the power to remedy our situation. The Red Cross took criticisms to heart and it was obvious that they were distressed when attacked for what some saw as their lack of effort on our behalf. Initially, their conversations were with us as individuals but gradually, when the Americans gave permission, they talked with us in groups, based on our divisions. By talking to us in groups, not only did they save time but it was much better for us since the discussions would often last up to four hours.

Q: Mamosta, from an Islamic viewpoint, how would you evaluate the role of humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross?

Ali Bapir: I told them that they were doing humanitarian work, and that they had no business being involved with intellectual or political trends. For me, if any human being is imprisoned and is subjected to any wrongs or faces difficul-

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ties, they had the responsibility to act as a bridge between the prisoner and his family. For this reason alone I believe that everyone should appreciate their work. I felt that particularly strongly as a Muslim. Islam came into being so that human beings might be respected irrespective of their religion or ideology. Almighty God respects human beings: "And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them above much of what We have created, with [definite] preference"(A-Isra:70). I read this verse to them and said that all the blessings that had been bestowed by God were for the benefit of the whole of humanity, not only Muslims: 1-"indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam"; 2-"and We have carried them on land and sea", which means God enabled all people to benefit from what is on the land and in the sea); 3-"and have provided them of the good things"; 4-"and preferred them above much of what We have created". Those benefits are to be shared by human beings. In another verse Allah says: "We have certainly created man in the best of stature (mould)"(At-Tin:4). I told them that protecting a person's rights, his honour, his dignity and his individuality, was a task worthy of respect and that I, as a Muslim, appreciated the work they did was a duty which was legitimate and necessary. I explained that I found it important that I thanked them. In my letters, I told my family and my brothers to respect the Red Cross, to facilitate its work, and assist those who had offices in Hawler and Suleimani. I believed that because they were providing humanitarian services we had to assist, co-operate and thank them whenever we could. When I came back they were pleased to see me and came to thank me for giving instructions to my group to work with them. Before my letters, it seems that many were

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too afraid to co-operate with the Red Cross because it had been attacked and people were warned not to engage with the organization. I instructed my group to take care of them, respond to their needs, and appreciate what they were trying to do.

Q: How did the prison guards treat you? How did they deal with any requests that you might have?

Ali Bapir: The conduct of the prison guards and their treatment of us depended on their moods. Some of them abided by the instructions they were given by the prison administrators, who told them to behave with propriety towards us and they did. Others, when in a mood, behaved disgracefully towards us. They would say things like, this one is Jewish, or that one has no father or mother, or that such and such a prisoner had been divorced by his wife and claimed a letter had come confirming this. One day, one of the kinder guards was clearly confused and I asked what the problem was. Someone translated for me that he had been told that his wife had divorced him. He was told this by the same guards who told others that they were orphans or had been divorced. The guard told me that his parents were both dead and he had been brought up in care until he had joined the army. These guards, some of whom were Jewish, others Christian, created a terrible psychological atmosphere. They seemed determined to hurt people. For example, I was exercising one day, walking briskly. One of these guards asked me why I was in such a rush. I told him I was exercising and there was no rule against walking quickly. He told me to go inside. I said that that was not a problem and went inside and put my chair in front of the window, and in front of the door. He told me that I could not read the Quran and I asked

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where I could read it. He then said that he had to lock the door. I simply said that was all right by me, I was helpless to do anything else, and he threatened that if I raised my voice he would lock my window as well. If he had closed the window I would have been left in the dark because there was no electricity. This instruction that I could not read the Quran out loud was personal vindictiveness. It was not an instruction from his superiors. On the other hand, there were those guards who, when they took us to the bathroom, would tell us to take our time and enjoy the fresh air. Usually, however, we were in a rush to get to the bathroom to do everything we needed to. We told them that what we would really appreciate was a little extra time in the bathroom before being returned to our cells. Some of them asked us what we did in the cells all day and if we were bored. We replied that we all became very bored and miserable being locked up for so long but we had no answer to our dilemma and neither did they. So there were guards who showed some kindness and were magnanimous to an extent. Their rules gave the guards the leeway to exercise personal judgment in both negative and positive ways.

Q: Were the prison guards male or female?

Ali Bapir: They were mainly men but there were women too.

Q: Were the female guards kinder?

Ali Bapir: Yes, the women were kinder but some of them displayed no morality in their dealings with other guards or inmates. Whenever they could, they exchanged gestures and jokes and shouted at one another. I was surprised by their behavior and wondered why they acted in the way they did. I was surprised there was no evidence of any morality or mod-

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esty. I had a feeling that the husbands of those women were the kind of men who sought sexual relationships outside of their marriage, and saw that as quite normal. They all had relationships with each other and they were not shy about it.

Q: Mamosta, were there Muslim soldiers?

Ali Bapir: I never heard of any but probably if there were they did not dare to declare their faith.

Q: Were there disputes over the food which you were unused to?

Ali Bapir: I found it very difficult and one of the other prisoners warned me that I was becoming weaker through lack of food. I told him I just had no appetite for the food, I could not eat it. He told me none of the prisoners liked the food but ate it to fill their stomachs, as the only way to keep up their strength, and that I had to do the same. I asked him if what he had said was true and he swore by God that no one liked it any more than I did but had to eat it to survive. I believed him and his words affected me and I tried to find something edible in what they gave us. In the beginning, I would not open the packs, except to look for drinks, and immediately threw them away. After speaking to my fellow prisoner, I decided that I had to try the food. It is said that a starving man does not care what he eats. After I had tried some of the food, I realized that some of it was quite good and edible so, gradually, I came to eat what was provided.

Q: Mamosta, were you ever punished for disobeying any orders or instructions?

Ali Bapir: In my own case, not often. Whenever the prison administrators saw me they would often praise the cleanliness of my cell and commend me for my behaviour.

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I was punished on 3 occasions, none of which were merited. I was punished, along with others, for saying salam. On another occasion I was walking too quickly for one guard's liking and when I pointed out that there was no rule against it I was sent to my cell. Another time, I was chastised because I washed my hands with a bar of soap that the guard said I had no right to use. I said that when we went to the washroom this was the only soap available with which to wash our hands but he ordered me to stop using it or I would be punished. I did not understand what he was saying. Those who understood English better than me did and did not use the soap. My English was insufficient to understand him and so I carried on washing my hands. The guard became very angry and he became red in the face and shouted at me. The others told me that he was telling me not to use the soap but I would not give in. I felt I could not go on living like this and so I finished washing using the soap. I did not care what he said or did. He sent me back to my cell. So I was unfairly punished 3 times but not for any other things. There were those who were punished because they raised their voices, criticized the food or talked back to them angrily. They were punished for those reasons. I did not do anything like that. I told the other prisoners not to engage in such behavior as it was demeaning and we had to show respect for ourselves.

Q: Were there any other Kurdish prisoners?

Ali Bapir: They brought Omar Baziyani here but I do not know exactly where he was held and after a while he disappeared. I asked him later where he was for this period of time and he told me that he had been taken back to Suleimani. I asked if they had hurt him and he said that they had not on that occasion but had done so previously. Later, he

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told another prisoner that I had confessed to whatever it was claimed I had done and admitted to everything.

Q: How did you know each other?

Ali Bapir: He recognized me. I called adhan from time to time. I wore Kurdish clothes, so he recognized me, and he told his friends that he was Omer Baziyani. I did not recognize him; he wore similar clothes to them. He greeted me but he was in a different section so we could not talk to one another.

Q: Could you describe these sections for us?

Ali Bapir: I will explain them to you as clearly as I can. Each section had 21 cells, and was adjacent to another section of 21, providing 42 cells for solitary confinement. Opposite, there were further cells, also numbering 42, making a total of 84. One facing wing had a further 21 cells, providing accommodation in all for over 100 prisoners in single cells. In addition, there were 3 halls, each of them with the capacity for 10 people. All of these sections were around one yard which itself was surrounded by 3 barriers, barbed wire and towers with armed guards.

Q: When you were outside your own division, did you have the chance to meet other prisoners?

Ali Bapir: No, when they took us to the doctors for treatment we saw people from other parts of the prison and greeted them. We also saw prisoners from other divisions when they took us to the bathroom or if they were bringing people from another division for interrogation. Otherwise we saw only people opposite. There were entrances which they later closed due to shootings and we were separated, so that we

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could no longer see others. They had come to the entrances and pathways for sports and to see one another but later that was blocked.

Q: So most of the time you were 21 by 21?

Ali Bapir: Yes.

Q: Did you try to learn English?

Ali Bapir: I was willing to try anything to improve communication with them. I did not have any books with me so I asked them to bring me an English dictionary but they refused. There was no one who could teach me English, so I had to learn as best I could on my own.

Q: Mamosta, in this prison did they provide for your healthcare needs? If someone became ill, how did he receive treatment?

Ali Bapir: Healthcare, in some respects was good. Those who had high blood pressure or diabetes were checked daily but for some diseases it was bad. For example, on three occasions I had kidney pain. The first time, I thought it was appendicitis. The pain was in my right side and was very severe. I woke up at 2 o'clock in the morning feeling pain in the right side of my stomach, which is why I thought it was my appendix. I was patient for two hours and put up with the pain, expecting that it would get better but it increased. The whole of my body was covered in sweat and I was in extreme discomfort. I knocked on the cell door and explained to the guard who came to see what my problem was and I pointed out to him where the pain was located. My neighbour had a good command of English and I called on him to translate for me. He told the guard of my symptoms and suggested

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that I might have appendicitis. The guard did not believe us and said that I would have to wait until 8:00AM when the doctor came on duty. I asked if there was anyone, a nurse perhaps, that could treat me. But there was not. I ended up holding the pain between 2.00 and 8.00 A.M. I felt very unwell until the doctor arrived. My friend asked to stay with me, fearing that I might die. I was sweating profusely and had turned very pale and my neighbor was convinced that my symptoms indicated appendicitis. The guard refused to allow it, which I think confirms that whether I lived or died was of little moment to the Americans.

While they were busy locking the door, I was asking Allah for his help and mercy so that I would not be beholden to them. While they were outside the door, I had a sensation as if a fire was extinguished by water and the pain was gone.

On other occasions when I had kidney pain, I asked if it was possible for me to have a check up to determine whether I did have appendicitis. I was told I did not and that the pain came from kidney problems for which I had to drink as much water as I could. The Red Cross people asked me how I was health wise and I told them that some aspects were good but others not. I explained that, for example, when I had kidney pain I was simply told to drink more water. The Red Cross visitor was a lady and she laughed at that and asked if I had been given any other treatment. I told her that I had drunk a great deal of water and passed the stone!

There were people put in wheelchairs or held by the hand who were not looked after properly. Their attitude was that we could get better by ourselves. There were times when help was offered, though some doctors were better than others

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which I was surprised at. A few of the administrators helped by organizing transport for those who were ill or arranging for medical staff to come to the prison but the main message was always to relax and we would recover!

Q: Did you have kidney problems before your imprisonment or did they develop while you were there?

Ali Bapir: There.

Q: You did not have any problems before?

Ali Bapir: The first time I had any problem was in Tahran, but I had no further problems until I was imprisoned.

Q: Mamosta, were you aware of developments that were taking place outside the prison? Did they provide you with any means of acquiring information?

Ali Bapir: We had no news, except when one of us was visited by a relative and he had the opportunity to pass on information. Normally, however, our only source of information was the guards or interrogators who now and then would talk amongst themselves about events going on in the outside world such as an election or someone being killed. Other than that we had no access to news. There were no televisions or radios and, until about three months before my release, no newspaper. At that point we were given copies of the Assabah newspaper and that became our source of information about what was going on in the world.

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Q: Mamosta, during your stay in prison supporters of the Islamic Group and the Islamic masses arranged many civic activities protesting against your arrest and your imprisonment. Two large, popular demonstrations were arranged in Hawler and Suleimani, a demonstration was held in London, and a conference in support of your release followed. Did you hear of any of this in prison?

Ali Bapir: I had been in my cell for a month or more when Ali Hassan Majid was brought to the prison. He did not know I was there because everyone was confined to their cell. Obviously he knew who I was and one day as he passed by my cell he called out my name. I answered and he then told me that he had good news which was that a large demonstration had been held in protest at my arrest. I asked where the demonstration had been staged but he was not sure, saying only that it had been very large and held in either Hawler or in Suleimani.

Q: Did he see this personally?

Ali Bapir: He said that he had and when I asked how, he replied that the demonstration had been on television and widely reported in newspapers. I was absolutely delighted. That was the first time that I had any news of what was being done to secure my release. Later, Barzan, one of his relatives, a cousin, not Saddam's brother Barzan, told me that he had seen the demonstration too.

Q: Did they ask about the slogans used in these demonstrations?

Ali Bapir: They did not mention anything about slogans but they did tell me that many people participated in the demonstration, holding placards and some made speeches in

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Arabic calling for my release and telling the listeners that I had been invited to a meeting with the Americans and then unlawfully arrested. I was very pleased to hear this.

Q: Was that the first news you heard?

Ali Bapir: Yes, yes, I thanked Allah that we had left people behind and that they were still in charge!

Q: After how many months did you hear this news?

Ali Bapir: Probably a month and a half after the date of the event.

Q: We have read from press reports of the treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan and Guantanamo that Americans shaved the beards and mustaches of Muslims. Were any of you subjected to similar treatment?

Ali Bapir: As for me, nothing like that happened but the Americans were always making comments about my appearance and asking me why I had a beard. When I was being tortured they would pull my beard to make me get to my feet. They did not say that I had to shave it off but they did use it as a way to torture me.

Q: To what extent did your feelings for your family, your children, your relatives, and the people you knew affect you?

Ali Bapir: Of course a lot. If you have a great heart, it will find a place for everything. I was desperate to see them. I sent a letter to my family asking them to send me a photograph of my children. I did not know whether they were alive or dead. As for information about anyone else, there was no possibility of finding out what was happening to our broth-

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ers. The Americans would only allow us to ask about our own families in any letters or calls we made. We were forbidden to ask about anyone else on pain of losing our opportunity to send letters. I have recently looked at the letters I sent and can see where they have been censored and, similarly, with letters I received, I could tell when a passage had been erased. They censored a great deal but almighty Allah made me aware of what my family, friends and brothers in the leadership and others were thinking. I communicated with many; in my dreams God brought the images of those I wanted to see. For example, on the issue of collecting signatures for a petition, I did not know what was happening but twice in my dreams I saw a number of tribal leaders and people who were collecting signatures. I did not hear about the petition but sometimes my lord Allah had a way of showing me what was necessary.

I was eager to see my father because he was getting older. Between you and I, if I did not help him, no one else would. He had nothing else so I longed to see him. Whenever I became very anxious to see him, almighty God showed him to me in the most beautiful way. I wondered if I would ever see him again because I did not know if I would be held for two years or ten. I kept my hopes alive but I did not know how long it would take to secure my release. I asked if I could be allowed to see my father and explained that he was very elderly and had no one to support him. God showed me my wife and children, my brothers and sisters, as sitting as they are now. I saw them and I looked at them, as well as those brothers with whom I had a close relationship.

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Q: Let us come to the psychological aspects of how you were treated. Did they use psychology against you? If so, how did that manifest itself?

Ali Bapir: Definitely, I was subjected to psychological intimidation and pressure. They put me in impossible situations, asking why I did not tell them everything they wanted. They wanted to know any secrets relating to the Islamic group and what they called the truth about its intentions and relationships with other groups and individuals. They told me that I should stop struggling and toiling for nothing and that I was sacrificing myself for something that no longer existed. They claimed that the Islamic Group did not exist anymore and that it had vanished, therefore I was resisting for no reason and had to tell them what they wanted to know. I refused to believe them and told them so. They insisted that they were telling the truth and that I could not possibly have had any information to the contrary. They constantly claimed that there was no longer an Islamic Group, all its bases were gone, everyone had been arrested and no one remained. I said that it was true that I did not know if any one remained or not, but the Islamic Group would go on. They asked me how I knew that and I replied that I knew because the Islamic Group follows Allah, and any assembly gathered in the name of Allah could not be destroyed or crushed. Yes, we were far from happy and they were threatened to send all of us to Guantanamo or they threatened to arrest our families and imprison them, just as they had done in the case of one of our number whose wife had been arrested and brought to our prison and kept in isolation, away from her husband. They told us that they had means of torture that they had not up until then used on us but would do in the future. I did not care what they threatened and I told them to do whatever

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they wanted to me but I would say no more to them than I had done. I was consistent from when I was arrested until the day of my release and maintained my position that I had been illegally arrested, all allegations against me were false, and my belief in the Islamic Group was unshaken, no matter what they said.

Yes, they tried everything they could against me. When I was arrested, I was ill with a chest inflammation that I had picked up when I was in Pishder, in Darashmana, and was soaked. I had stayed with my peshmarga because I thought it would help boost their morale and our tents leaked so badly that I was drenched. I took medication for the infection and had an ultrasound in Suleimani. It was there that I learned of the infection. So, in addition to the torture inflicted by the Americans, my illness became worse. I asked for a doctor or at least some medication to help me. After the first 9 days of my arrest, I was taken to the camp and I did not see a doctor for another month or so after that but I was continuously interrogated despite my condition. Every day I pointed out the contradiction between their claim to be upholders of human rights and their refusal to let me have access to a doctor or to medication. They laughed at me and on one occasion when they had a woman with them, I felt she had some sympathy for me and my plight. She made a remark, expressing concern about my health but was immediately told by one of the guards that I was to be left to suffer, as he put it. When they saw that I could not be co-erced by being deprived of food and drink or medical attention they changed their attitude towards me. One day a nurse came and told me to come with her to see the doctor. After a further 9 days, a different nurse checked who I was and she then took me to a doctor who gave me a check up. I still had the marks of beatings on

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my body, so after between 30 and 40 days of my arrest they finally brought me tablets and medication. My chest inflammation subsided and my condition became much better.

Q: How long did this psychological ill treatment go on for?

Ali Bapir: Interrogations continued for 6 to 7 months. During these interrogations they used psychological tactics against me. For example, they kept me standing even when I was sick and not only that, I was made to stand in the sun for up to 4 hours at a time, while at the same time announcing to the world that they did not torture their prisoners. On those occasions I was so thirsty that I feared I would faint and fall against the barbed wire that they made me stand adjacent to.

Q: Were you standing while in the sun?

Ali Bapir: Yes, I was stood facing the sun. One of them asked his colleague how long they were to keep me standing in the heat. His reply was that I was to be kept there until I fell. I asked them for their help, I was so tired, exhausted and thirsty. They said they would take me back inside if I told them what I knew about the things they were asking me about. I said that if those were the conditions I would rather stay where I was. They told me that I was very stubborn but I refuted that and said my position was not about stubbornness but about what I knew and did not know and what I believed. They told me my attitude would lead to my death and I answered that that did not matter and that I would not change my position. From time to time I was able to pick up a few words of what they said and I gathered that they had decided that even though I would not give them what they wanted, they no longer needed to ill treat me and they took me inside. They began questioning me again but I told them

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that I was so thirsty and my throat so dry that I could not speak even if I wanted to. They threatened to take me outside again. I told them again that I could hardly speak two words, let alone answer their questions. They did then allow me to have some water but only enough to wet my lips. I told them not to waste their time with me as the death they threatened me with was preferable to me than their abuse. They often called me a liar and I vehemently rejected this and told them that I had never knowingly told a lie in my life and that no one other than them had ever called me a liar. I made it clear that physical torture held no terrors for me. I told them to go and investigate what I was saying for themselves. I had already told them what I knew, or was prepared to tell them, and that could be verified by others. I said that if they found any discrepancy in my statements they were free to deal with me as they saw fit. This was the kind of pressure under which I lived during my imprisonment but they did gradually decrease as time went on.

Q: Did you have a chance to talk to the soldiers and tell them about Islam?

Ali Bapir: Many times, mostly with the interrogators. We had numerous discussions.

Q: Did those discussions have any impact on them?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they left a mark on them but this matter needs to be explained more fully.

Q: If Allah wills it, can tell us about this in detail?

Ali Bapir: Yes, our discussions focused on topics such as secularism, the political system in Islam and why the Islamic Group wanted an Islamic state in Iraq then. We also spoke

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about our position with regards to the West, in particular towards the US, and also about western philosophies and theories.

I also talked to the guards. They were not well educated but they had questions and had been influenced by the behavior and attitudes with which they had been brought up. They were curious about Islam. I believe some of them were influenced by the ideas and perhaps thought about them later. I was asked what someone who embraced Islam had to say and do, what the relationship was between men and women, and what an Islamic family was like. I felt some of them that asked about Islam were frightened to be seen talking about the subject. Before my time at the prison, I gather that one soldier converted before being dismissed and removed. The soldiers were very cautious about bringing up the subject of Islam with us but I believe that a few were sympathetic to me and if they asked questions always asked that I tell no one about our discussions. Sometimes they would bring me things again on condition that no one else knew. They feared that they would be punished and I was told one soldier was punished after being seen laughing or talking with us.

Q: How did you treat your guards?

Ali Bapir: My treatment of the guards, as Islam commands, was always positive. I talked to all of them and I treated them with respect because I realized not to do so, always being antagonistic, was not the way to behave in my situation. I did not approve of those who went out of their way to be awkward or do silly things to annoy or upset the guards. I never raised my voice or deliberately caused them any trouble. I believe that they respected me. For example, some of

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the prisoners wanted to pass on information to someone in another division, and so they asked me to walk with them because they believed the guards respected me and that if I was with them they would not be shouted at. They thought that I had a degree of prestige amongst the guards and that I was regarded as having some gravity (may God increase that). There were some guards who knew that this was a violation of the rules and came to me quietly to say that this was not acceptable and that it must not happen again. I tried not to do things that would provoke them so I complied with the instruction. Most of the time I was in my cell and I never complained about food or anything else. There were those who made trouble over the lack of hot water, cigarettes or medicine but I did not. I did not smoke and as I did not complain about food or drink I was seen as someone who did not cause the guards any problems. I did not feel raising your voice was appropriate behaviour. Prisoners would often call to each other from their cells but I did not and I was asked why I kept so quiet. I replied that I was reading the Quran, other books, and praying. I did not welcome the noise of shouting. The guards said that they respected the fact that I kept quietly dignified. Sometimes the guards would close all the windows in the cells of those who shouted out. For me, your personality is reflected in your behaviour.

Q: Do you have any examples of a guard bringing you a gift?

Ali Bapir: When I started writing, after I was given permission by the prison administrators, I was allowed to have a pen and paper. One of the guards whose name was Joseph, that is Yusuf in our language, told me that his name was really Yusuf but the Americans called him Joseph. He was an older man, perhaps 50 years old. He bought a notebook

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for me out of his own money. He also bought me pens and pencils. What we were given officially was very limited but he gave me notebooks, sometimes two at a time, and we became friends. I did not have enough English to converse with the Americans properly but when they saw me leading the prisoners in prayer or calling adhan, they were interested and asked me about what I was doing. Others would sit and play dominos or chess for up to 3 hours; if they had the time they were playing chess or Dama. Sometimes they raised their voices with each other which I did not like. I think they saw me as a special case. One of them approached me and said that he liked me and asked if there was anything he could do for me. One of the food packages sometimes had pistachios in it and on one occasion I was eating pistachios with my friends when there was a guard nearby. I told him to hold his hand out so that I could give him a share. He said no, even though I tried to persuade him that it was just a kindness and he seemed to have been looking at the nuts while we were eating. He said he would bring more later. He brought me a kilo of fried pistachios, which I distributed amongst the division. They were, of course, all very pleased. Once they brought us fruit, and occasionally they brought extra sweets for me, others, or even for everyone in the division.

Q: Did they introduce themselves and give their names?

Ali Bapir: Their names were embroidered on their uniforms or printed on badges but they also told us their names and a little about themselves such as where they lived and how many children they had.

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Q: Did you discuss their private lives with them?

Ali Bapir: Yes, for example there were those who told us about their situation, their status, whether they were married or not, if they were engaged or whether their parents were still alive. We talked about their social life. It was normal for them for a woman to divorce her husband and vice versa. I did not become involved in those discussions but my friends told me the stories they had heard. One guard said that he was engaged but his friend was living with his fiancé until he returned. I wondered how this could not be regarded as shameful and how the guard could tell everyone about it. However, these kinds of things seemed perfectly normal to them. The Prophet (the peace upon him) said, "If you are not shy you can do whatever you want". In other words, if you have no sense of honor anything is possible but the consequences are that the fabric of society and the structure of the family are destroyed.

Q: In the absence of a translator, who translated these discussions for you?

Ali Bapir: There were many people who were able to do that. When two or three divisions were mixed there were many who spoke English. There were two in particular who had a good grasp of the language. One of them was Dr. Sattam Al-Qauod; he was not a Ba'athist but a business man. He was an honourable man and became my friend. The other was Asil Tabra. He was a deputy for Udey Saddam Hussein, and we helped each other a great deal. They were my two closest friends, but there were many who regarded themselves as my friends and I respected them all.

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Q: What were your sleeping arrangements?

Ali Bapir: They brought us something like a bed; I put a piece of wood on it. To begin with there was no mattress but later, after about six months, they brought us mattresses and a blanket. After a year, we were given pillows. You got used to everything there.

Q: In addition to a door, a window and a shelf, was there anything else?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they brought me extra blankets and in the end I had three. I used one to pray on in my cell. I cleaned and washed my cell every one or two weeks. There was something akin to a bed but not a proper bed. It consisted of a piece of wood with a mattress upon which I put a blanket that I sat on. I wrote on a carton box, I busied myself for over a year, about 450 days, writing my book 'Islam Manifests in The Book of Allah'. I kept myself busy writing on the box. I exercised for 20 to 30 minutes every morning in my cell, I read the Quran while I walked from one corner to another. If they took us outside, I read it there too in the court yard. Otherwise I read while moving from corner to corner in my cell. I arranged things in this way, in order to maintain mobility so that my muscles did not wither.

Q: Mamosta, were the doors made of iron?

Ali Bapir: No, they were wooden, but they were very thick.

Q: Were the windows made of glass?

Ali Bapir: No, the windows were wooden, approximately 25cm by 25 cm. We complained about them because the cells were very dark. Our eyes became very weak and some got to

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the point that they could not read. Sometimes there was no electricity. Eventually they modified the windows into two sections, with one part having a plastic material that looked like glass that let more light in than previously. Some of the improvements were carried out after a year but others were not completed until 6 months before my release.

Q: What were the sanitary arrangements?

Ali Bapir: We were allowed to take a shower and wash ourselves at least twice a week, although we were restricted to ten minutes. Still, it was good as far as I was concerned. Some brothers complained that the sanitary arrangements were inadequate given that we were in a desert and the wind constantly blew dirt into our cells. I thought that all things considered the arrangements were relatively good. Yes, it is true that we were confined to our cells but as regards sanitation it seemed to me that we had better conditions than our captors.

Q: What was the temperature inside the cell?

Ali Bapir: In the first stages we had to spend up to two hours getting rid of bugs. Flies constantly buzzed around you and as soon as you got rid of one, another would appear. It was very difficult to sleep because of the mosquitos. It stayed like that for 2 to 3 months. Then after that, air conditioning was installed, so our things became a little bit better. They also started to give us insecticides that we could put at the doors. This helped to kill the bugs and flies. There were a lot of cockroaches and many bugs. I had sympathy for those creatures so I did not kill them but instead tried to put them out of my cell. My friends wanted me to kill them but I did not want to do that.

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It was desert and grasshoppers were always finding their way inside, especially if there was any food on the floor. If I ever had any cake the ants would cover it. I learned by experience that the thing to do was to hammer a nail into the wall and if I had any food I put it in a plastic bag and hung it on this nail. If I had not done so, my food would have been full of ants and thrown away as I had done before I came up with this solution.

Q: Was the food you were given normally the same as that given to other high ranking officials?

Ali Bapir: They had a tough time and were always complaining and grumbling. Some of them were sick but I had little sympathy for them because they had added to our problems when we were in the mountains and had to eat whatever we could find. That was why we were able to eat anything now whereas they had lived the good life and that was also why nothing satisfied them now. They disagreed with that assessment and swore by Allah that they were ill; some of them did have high blood pressure, some were diabetic, some had back pain, some had stomach disorders, some had thyroid problems, and a number had pains in the duodenum. God had mercy on me, and I did not suffer from any of these illnesses. I fasted a great deal and I suggested that they should too. They were convinced that if they fasted they would die. I told them that they were wrong and that fasting would be a lot better for them than sleeping all the time or playing dominos and chess. My opinion was that a better use of their time would be to read the Quran. They argued that if they did not play their games they would have nothing to do all day. Basically, they did not like the food.

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Q: Were they given cigarettes?

Ali Bapir: Yes, in the beginning they were given 6 cigarettes each and those who did not smoke gave their allowance to those who did. I would not take any cigarettes to begin with because I thought they were harmful. However, the Minister of Endowment spoke to me and said that some of the other prisoners were desperate for even one extra cigarette and that he would take the responsibility from me of passing on my allowance to those who wanted them. His view was that given our situation in prison there was a choice to be made between two evils, giving harmful cigarettes to brothers or allowing them to be miserable through a lack of nicotine, and that the lesser of the evils was to give any extra cigarettes we could acquire to our friends. I pondered on what he said and realized that from an Islamic point of view he had a case. Having thought the matter through, I decided to accept my allowance and give them to others as the better of the available choices. Even senior ministers or high ranking officials were delighted if you gave them a couple of cigarettes and were immensely grateful for the gift.

Q: Were they given alcoholic drinks?

Ali Bapir: No…

Q: Bakhtiar Amin, the Minister for Human Rights, visited Cropper Prison and saw some Ba'athist officials. Were you aware of this visit?

Ali Bapir: I did not know the details at the time but one day the Americans told us that Bakhtiar Amin, the Minister of Human Rights had come to see a Doctor Rehab and someone else. He certainly did not come to see me. Perhaps he was

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afraid of being seen as sympathetic to his fellow Kurds! I was the only Kurd there, and it may be he simply did not dare to come and greet me.

Q: Could he have come?

Ali Bapir: I do not know. What does it tell us if a minister was not permitted to see a prisoner? I was not bothered about whether I saw him or not. Between you and me, by the mercy of Allah, I have little respect or concern for those who lived a purely secular life.

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TOPIC 4 ACCUSATIONS AND INTERROGATION

3/07/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Mamosta, after you were arrested, in which prison did the interrogations begin?

Ali Bapir: On the same night they brought us to Baghdad they started the interrogation. They began immediately after they untied our hands and removed the black bags from our head and we had taken a comfort break and said our prayers. I was dealt with separately from the others.

Q: Was that the night of 11/7/2003?

Ali Bapir: They started the interrogations on the evening of 11/7.

Q: During your 22 months imprisonment, how many times were you interrogated?

Ali Bapir: I can divide the interrogation into 3 stages. The first stage was during the first 9 days. The second stage was when I was in solitary confinement in my cell for 10 days. During that time I was not questioned. On the 11th day of this second stage the interrogations re-commenced. On the

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40th day following my arrest, I was put on trial. The stated purpose of this tribunal was to determine whether I should be regarded as a prisoner of war or a civilian non-combatant detainee. The officiating judges asked me to swear that I would tell the truth and I replied that I did not need to swear to tell the truth as I never lied. The tribunal and questioning lasted for one and a half hours, after which they decided that I should be considered as a civil detainee rather than a prisoner of war. I asked the basis on which I was being detained since I had never been involved in any military action and had been arrested while travelling to a meeting with officials to which I had been invited. The second stage ended there with my designation as a civil inmate or CI for short.

The third stage began after my first 6 months in prison. Up until then the interrogations were intensive and long, sometimes lasting all day. After that, the questioning was far less frequent and I was told by my interrogators that they could find no truth in the allegations against me. They apologized and asked for my understanding and forgiveness that despite acknowledging that all the accusations were false, it was in their interests to keep me in detention. I was told that the order to keep me imprisoned had come down from the highest authorities. They told me that they had no doubt that I was an honest person and what I had told them was undoubtedly true.

Q: Were the interrogations carried out during the day or at night?

Ali Bapir: In the first stage I am not sure whether it was day or night because the interrogation room was always lit. I could not distinguish day from night in the place we were locked in. I guessed the time and asked the guards but they would not tell me. A few times they took me to one room

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which had a tiny hole and so I could tell if it was daytime or not. When I was in other rooms I could not tell the time of day at all. In the first 9 days I do not think it mattered whether it was day or night, the interrogations just kept going. Afterwards, I think most of them took place during the day. The ones that took place at night were clearly designed to disrupt my sleep by waking me in the middle of the night and so put psychological pressure on me. After those interrogations, I found it impossible to get back to sleep. Sometimes I was taken back to my cell only to be called back for interrogation a little later but after that period most of the interrogations took place during the day.

Q: In general, how long did the interrogations last?

Ali Bapir: At least one hour up to three hours though they could go on for five hours at a time. They were never less than one hour.

Q: Which agencies interrogated you; the FBI, CIA, or military intelligence? Were there any other agencies involved?

Ali Bapir: They did not tell me what organisation they belonged to, nor did they introduce themselves to me. I subsequently learned from fellow inmates that the interrogators included the FBI, CIA and military intelligence personnel.

I do not know how many different agencies were involved in the interrogations. Sometimes the interrogators were new and they were changed frequently. I never knew their names or their agency. Some came, interrogated me and left; I never saw them again.

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Q: How many interrogators were involved in questioning you at each session?

Ali Bapir: Sometimes there were four, sometimes three but there was always at least two in addition to a translator who translated from Arabic to English and vice versa.

Q: Did they question you in Arabic?

Ali Bapir: Yes, in Arabic. On a couple of occasions the interrogator, though American, spoke Arabic. Generally, however, they spoke English and the translator repeated their questions to me in Arabic.

Q: What were the specific accusations made against you?

Ali Bapir: In the beginning there were four. The first was that the Islamic Group intended to attack Allied Forces, that is the US and its allies. The second was that we supported Ansar al-Islam. The third was that we were in league with the Ba'thist regime and the fourth was that we had an active relationship with Iran. In the latter stages of the interrogation process they dropped the allegation that we were working with Iran. They replaced that accusation with one naming me as the leader of the Islamic Group in a letter to me. So the accusation was not that we had links with Iran but that I was the leader of the Islamic Group!

Q: How did you answer these accusations? In writing, or verbally? We heard that in the days following your arrest you had written a number of papers refuting the allegations. This story was widely circulated. To what extent is it true?

Ali Bapir: I do not know how these rumours started. When I returned no one mentioned any papers and I certainly did not talk about this with anyone. I did hear that others

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had written 80 pages but I did not make any such claim. In fact, I did not utter any word, far less claim to have written documents such as said in the rumours . I was asked by my interrogators on two occasions to put my answers in writing. I wrote around 4 to 5 pages, a maximum of 6. Those written answers were very brief but for the most part my answers were given verbally. I do not know if the Americans recorded my answers or not.

Q: Can we talk about your answers?

Ali Bapir: The answers are in my letters.

Q: We will attach your answers to this book when we publish.

Ali Bapir: You may publish them if you wish. These were the four main accusations, though they did question me about other things. These four main accusations had a large number of related issues about which I was questioned. They pressed for very detailed responses and if I say they asked me thousands of questions, I can assure you that I am not exaggerating. There were numerous interrogations and I would guess that in total they lasted at least eighty to ninety hours, probably more. I constantly told them that I had been arrested in error and that they would regret their mistake. I repeated that I was not a person that they were looking for but that simply angered them. They always answered that I was a person of interest to them and once again I would tell them that they had been given incorrect and false information about me and that this would eventually become clear. I made it clear that I had always opposed the Ba'athist regime, and that as a group we had never indicated any hostility towards the US. I acknowledged that we were not happy that they had occupied Iraq and that I regard them as an occu-

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pying force, as indeed they did themselves but that I had never done anything to warrant my arrest. This is basically the line I took when responding to the accusations against me. With regard to the first accusation, that we intended to attack coalition forces, I asked what proof they had for such an assertion. They wanted me to admit that this was my intention but I challenged them and demanded to see whatever written or other proof they had of the claim against me. They had no such evidence and I told them that no one but Allah knew what was in my heart or mind and that they certainly did not. I pointed out that under Islamic law revenge could not be taken for a crime as yet uncommitted, no one could be judged for something that had not occurred. If the contention is that a crime is planned, then proof has to be provided to substantiate the allegation. My situation was that there was no proof of any ill intent whatsoever.

In response to the allegation that we supported Ansar I told them to go and ask people in Kurdistan, the PUK and any other political factions. We had a clear and well known position vis a vis the Ansar group. Fundamentally, I regarded their existence as illegitimate. I told them in no uncertain terms that they were mistaken and that there was absolutely no justification for their existence. I said to them your existence is a mistake. You have no justification to exist after. Following our declaration of our position in relation to Ansar we concluded an agreement with the PUK. If we had continued to support Ansar, the PUK would have cut off its monthly financial support to us. That support was in the region of 2 million Iraqi dinars. There is no way that the PUK would have continued to support us financially or in other ways if there was any suggestion that we supported Ansar. The alle-

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gation was totally false. In fact, we paid a very dear price for the fact that our bases were located close to theirs.

In response to the claim that I had a relationship with the Ba'thist regime, I challenged this assertion vigorously. I was surprised that such a suggestion was even mooted and asked who had levelled the accusation against me. If I had been identified, I assumed that it must have been by one of the regime leadership who were imprisoned with me. I asked that I be brought face to face with my accusers. Abd Ali Hassan Al-Majid and Abd Hmud both told me, as did others from the Ba'thist regime, that the Americans had asked them about me but everyone told them that I had nothing to do with them and, on the contrary, that I had opposed the regime. I challenged the Americans to produce anyone who had claimed that I had any kind of relationship with the Ba'thists. Yes, it is true that the regime did send us officials to try to negotiate but we did not engage with them in any way and we definitely never co-operated with them.

In regard to our relationship with Iran, yes, we did have normal diplomatic relations, in common with many other Iraqi opposition factions. The relationship between other factions and Iran, particularly those of the PDK and the PUK, were far older, stronger, wider, and more deep rooted than anything we had with the Iranians. If your relationship is at any level, you have to have people in communication so we had a bureau in Tehran to service our needs. For example, if we wanted to travel we had to arrange matters through Iran. If I wanted to go on the Umra or take part in the Haj, I had to do so through Iran because the Iraqi regime did not permit us to travel and there was no other access to the outside except through the Islamic Republic. Our relationship with

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Iran was of that nature although Iran did co-operate with groups opposed to the Iraqi regime, particularly before signing the agreement of 1988. Iran helped the Iraqi opposition and we do not deny that they helped us too until they signed the agreement, after which they said that the terms of their agreement prevented them from continuing to support us as they had the Islamic Movement. They never provided any support for the Islamic Group, which only came into existence after they had signed their accord. Overall, in fact our relationship with Iran was at a much lower level than that which existed between them and other Iraqi groups.

I found the accusation that I was the leader of the Islamic Group confusing to say the least. I pointed out that if my leadership of my group was deemed to be a crime then this seemed to imply that the Americans regarded the perfectly legitimate work of an Islamic faction in the Muslim world was somehow illegal. I suggested to them that if that was what they believed then they should be honest enough to say so publicly and make it clear that as an occupying force they were prohibiting Islamic work within the Muslim community and that this included refusing to allow Muslims to organize themselves through Islamic political organizations. Such a policy needed, in my opinion, to be publicized, if indeed that was their position. On the other hand, if there was no such prohibition then I expressed my surprise at their attitude to me as the leader of the Islamic Group, a position to which I had been elected and could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered criminal, and certainly not something which justified my arrest. When they repeated this accusation for a second time I refused to respond and remained silent. They did not repeat the accusation after that.

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In general, when I asked for proof relating to their allegations, I was constantly fobbed off with promises that they would provide evidence the next day or soon after. On every occasion I would remind them of their promise and on every occasion they either looked away or claimed that they had not been able to find the documents they had referred to. These conversations usually ended with further assurances that the proof they claimed to have would be shown to me in due course. They never did provide a shred of evidence for their allegations because, of course, they could not as it did not exist and never had.

> ***Q: Before your arrest you will be aware that the Hawal newspaper had reported that you had a relationship with the Ba'athist regime, based on forged documentation. The Aso newspaper had published a similar story. These allegations were refuted at the time of publication but was the content of those reports used as proof of the allegations against you or used in any other way against you?***

Ali Bapir: It appears that those reports which were published in those newspapers in Kurdistan had some impact on my popularity among simple minded people, but the American intelligence agencies knew what is proof and what is not. They would have been reluctant to use such stories against me, so no, they did not refer to those reports and, indeed, could not because they were not in any way proof of what was alleged.

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Q: Were the questions put to you in the interrogations always the same ones? Once you had shown them an allegation was groundless, were any dropped or did they continue to question you about it?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they constantly repeated the same questions over and over again until, on one occasion, I became angry and the interrogator was replaced. There were between thirty and forty different interrogators involved at different times in my interrogations. Groups of interrogators were always coming and going. In the main they were American but some were British and Australian.

On the occasion I lost my temper and refused to answer their questions. I was asked why I was not answering them and I told them to go and look at the transcripts of all the other interrogations and they would find the answers to all their questions already recorded. One insisted that I answer him but I continued to refuse and said that I only had one answer and that it had already been given. Another time I was being interrogated, I was told that the following day I would be given important information and that I should prepare myself. I said that was not a problem for me as the answers to any questions would be totally consistent with what I had already said to them. Everything was repeated endlessly. Prior to my interrogations, I had assumed that American techniques would be sophisticated and advanced but that was not the case. Their methods were simplistic. There seemed to be little co-ordination between one group of interrogators and another. They did not seem to know what each other had covered and so were always going over the same ground. Even when one group would tell me that they had come to the end of their questioning on one topic, the next group would start all

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over again. When I mentioned this to them they would only say that my answers were new to them and, therefore, they would carry on despite my protests that I had already dealt with the issue. The confusion possibly arose because the interrogators seemed to be on six months contracts, sometimes less, and given the lack of liaison between them it is perhaps no surprise that the whole process was an absolute shambles.

Q: Let us come back to the interrogators themselves. What rank or status did those who interrogated you have within their agencies, as far as you know? Were they all men or were there also women?

Ali Bapir: I never knew their ranks or their status within their organisations but once an interrogator told me that he had questioned Ali Hassan Al-Majid, Taha Yassin and Tariq Aziz. I believe his first name was Paul and he was an older man. Sometimes, in the beginning, there were four or five women among them who asked me the odd question but later the women questioned only the others, not me.

Q: In those interrogations, were the accusations made only against you or did they ask about others within the Islamic Group? At the time of your arrest, American forces were looking for Dilshad Kalari whom they accused of helping Ansar. Did they ask you questions about him?

Ali Bapir: They asked me about many of the members of the leadership of the Islamic Group. The questions were mostly about me but they asked about others, including Mamosta Sheikh Muhammad Barzinjee, brothers in the political bureau, and about Mamosta Nazim Abdullah who, it was claimed, had said things in the early days that they wanted more information on. I did not know about this claim.

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Q: Was this to the Aljazeera channel?

Ali Bapir: Yes. They asked if he was my deputy and I answered that he was not and, in fact, I did not have a deputy at all. They then wanted to know what position he held in our organization and I told them that he was a member of the political bureau. They asked about Mamosta Nasih Mala Salih, Haji Dilshad, and about other brothers who were members of the leadership. I told them who was in the political bureau and what functions each had in a totally open and transparent way.

Q: Did they ask more questions about Kak Dilshad Kalary than the others? Was there a specific interrogation session on him?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they did ask about him more than anyone else but I told them frankly that Kak Dilshad was a member of the political bureau in the same way as our other brothers. I told them that he was one of the closest people to me and whatever he did, he did it on my instruction. I took full responsibility for anything any of them did and said that if they had any questions about their activities they should ask me.

As you know, Mamosta Dara, Mamosta Tawfiq and Kak Hajji Abdurrahman Ahmad, all brothers in the leadership, were arrested with me. I asked the Americans to release them and the peshmargas as it was clear that it was me that they really wanted. I made it clear that I was in charge of the Islamic Group and I was the one responsible for the Group. On that basis I asked them to release the others as it was unfair that they should be hurt or punished for my actions. I learned later that the last to be released was my brother Ibrahim. He

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was held for eleven months and the others were imprisoned for similar periods.

With regard to Hajji Dilshad, I said that he never did anything without my permission and I was convinced that following my arrest he would do nothing to change the policies and programs of the Islamic Group. I told the Americans that if they heard anything to the contrary that they were being lied to by his opponents. Some of those opponents had a very personal hatred of Hajji Dilshad but I knew him to be brave and smart. He was close to me and I believe that those who hated him did so because he was absolutely loyal to the Islamic Group. In any fight or confrontation he was always brave and this resulted in the personal animosity to which he was subjected.

Q: What were the issues and topics they asked you about in relation to Kak Dilshad?

Ali Bapir: Mostly they were security issues. For example, they claimed that they had information that he supported Ansar al-Islam and that they had information that he was about to attack American forces. They characterized him as a violent extremist. I told them that they were wrong and that Sharia law enjoins us to be firm when necessary and meek when that is called for. I explained that we obeyed our laws and that Kak Dilshad was no different to the rest of us in that respect.

With regard to Ansar, I told them that contrary to what they had been told he had complained on many occasions about that group and had spoken to them himself in very harsh terms. He tried his best to bring them into our fold in the Islamic Group but, like many others, he was unsuccessful.

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Their views were too different from ours. He was successful in bringing individuals around to our way of thinking, possibly as many as two hundred. He was, of course, not alone in that effort but he did play a significant part.

Q: Did your answers convince the Americans that Kak Dilshad was innocent?

Ali Bapir: I believe they did reach that belief; they did not bring it up again. I told them they could ask whatever they wanted and that I had proof for every answer I gave, though not necessarily with me in prison. I encouraged them to ask others about what I was telling them as I knew what I was saying would be verified. I agreed that some might be suspicious of Kak Dilshad but that suspicion was not proof while I had clear proof that he had tried to bring Ansar into our group and that he had done so with my express approval. He always listened and carried out the instructions of the leadership and I had proof of what I was saying, unlike those who cast aspersions on his activities.

Q: According to what you said earlier, the Americans ultimately acknowledged that you were innocent and asked for your forgiveness. Did they reach that conclusion because of your answers to their questioning or because of information they learned from other channels or sources?

Ali Bapir: Probably a combination of factors contributed to their final assessment of me. My answers were all true and straightforward and without any ambiguity. If I was asked how many centers we had, I simply told them the truth. Similarly, when asked how many there were in our leadership group, what weapons we held, and the number of peshmargas we controlled, I gave them the true figures. I also told them

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that we had sent our peshmargas home when the regime collapsed and we believed they were no longer needed in what we assumed would be a freer system. From our perspective, there was no need to continue to arm ourselves if we were no longer being provoked or attacked. I told them all of this clearly and frankly and I do believe that my candour had an impact on their attitude to me. However, many others who campaigned for my release, and those who held demonstrations protesting against my imprisonment, all played a role in securing my release. It is my belief that the demonstrations and the petitions signed by so many Imams, tribal leaders, political leaders from a spectrum of factions, and friends, both within and outside Kurdistan, were particularly important in shaping the American view of both myself and the Islamic Group. The popularity of our Group as demonstrated in elections was another important factor in all of this.

Q: Some time after your arrest, Mamosta Mullah Ali Abdul-Aziz was also arrested. Did they question you about him?

Ali Bapir: I was told by an interrogator on the day of Mamosta Ali's arrest. I was extremely upset and anxious and my guards noticed this and asked me why I was so distressed as they assumed that I had had disagreements with him. I responded by telling them that while I might have disagreements with any of my co-religionists about aspects of Islam, that did not mean that I welcomed the arrest of any fellow Muslim, especially one who had been our leader for four days. I was upset at the thought of an elderly man being in the hands of Kuffars and I was genuinely concerned that at his age he would not be able to cope with the ill-treatment that I had received. Yes, I was very unhappy about his arrest.

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Q: There were reports that he was arrested because of information that you had provided. Was that true?

Ali Bapir: My information?!

Q: Yes, to what extent is that claim true?

Ali Bapir: I swear by God it is absolutely baseless! I was asked about him at the time when we were both members of the Islamic Unity Group and why the Islamic Group had been formed. I told them that following our conference, Mamosta Ali and his supporters refused to accept the decisions and outcomes of that meeting and, finally, after 9 months, during which time numerous efforts were made to mediate and reconcile our differences, we decided that we could not wait any longer and had to found our own separate group. We declared the foundation of the Islamic Group which we regarded as the body best placed to carry on the traditions, policies and successes of the Islamic Unity Movement. We believed we had a perfect right to do this as 26 of the 30 elected members of the conference joined us. In addition to that, the majority of cadres, members, and peshmargas in our bases were with us. We were the legitimate successors of the Islamic Unity Movement and had basically changed our name and not much else. Mamosta Mullah Ali Abdul-Aziz refused to be bound by the outcome of the conference and so we erased his name from our membership list. This was how I answered the American questions on this issue. If America had information against Mullah A li Abdul-Aziz that resulted in him being held for between ten and fifteen days then it must have come from others or, alternatively, the Americans just unilaterally decided to arrest him. Later, when I saw Mamosta Mullah Ali on my own, his situation seemed to be

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very different from my own. He told me that he had not been ill-treated, thanks be to Allah and in any case he was released quite quickly after his arrest compared to myself and others.

It was, and is, not in my nature to inform on Mamosta Mullah Ali, or anyone else, and it was beneath my dignity to speak ill of him or any brother. I have never behaved in that way towards anyone. They asked me about the political leadership of Mamosta Mullah Ali's group, and though I did know certain things about them, I refused to share that information with the Americans on the grounds that I had a duty to respect the confidentiality of those who had trusted me and that I had no information that would in any way have been harmful to them to withhold. They tried to persuade me to betray those confidences by telling me that there were those who had spoken against me but I replied that each had to take responsibility for his own words and actions and my religious convictions were such that I could not say anything about anyone that might cause him harm. As far as I was concerned personally, I was happy to answer questions about myself but as far as others were concerned, the Americans would have to ask questions of the individuals themselves.

Q: What did you feel about the accusations made against you? Do you know the source of the information given to the Americans?

Ali Bapir: I believe that there were people inside Kurdistan who helped them. They may have given names but I told the Americans that even if they told me who those people were, I still regarded the Americans as the ones at fault since they were the ones who had arrested me. I saw no one else while imprisoned and had no reason to blame any other individual

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or faction. I am reasonably certain, however, that there were those who gave the Americans information about me and others.

Q: How long was there between your last interrogation and your release?

Ali Bapir: My last interrogation was 16 months after my arrest, at which time they said that they had nothing against me. It is worth going over the details of that interrogation:-

There were two British interrogators who said that they had some important questions to put to me and that they wanted to start afresh with me. They stated that they thought I was an important figure, principled, and straight forward. I said I was happy to answer what I could. One of the interrogators was the one I have mentioned previously who interrogated Ali Hassan Al-Majid, Taha Yassin, and Tariq Aziz and others. He asked me many questions over a three hour period; one thing I wish to mention is that he had a paper with a line drawn down the middle. On one side of the line he had written Sunni and on the other Shi'ite. He pointed the division out to me, simply saying that one side was Sunni and the other Shi'ite. I acknowledged what he said and waited to see where this was heading. He then asked whether the Al-Qaida organization was Sunni or Shi'ite. I told him that it was Sunni. He then asked the same question about the Dawa Party and I replied that it was Shi'ite. He asked whether I was Sunni or Shi'ite and I said that I was Muslim. His response was that he knew I was Muslim and asked me the same question again. I told him that I would be considered Sunni but asked him what he was driving at. His point, he said, was that as a Sunni was it not true that I was closer to Al-Qaida than the Dawa Party. I asked him if he wanted me to give

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him the answer he wanted or the one I believed and he said that he wanted to know what I believed. I asked him to give me the pen and paper so that I could let him know who I was. He gave me the pen and paper and I pointed to the line and said that it represented Islam and went on to explain that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is on this straight line when almighty Allah tells him to proclaim that he was the first Muslim (Al-Anam:163). Our Prophet (peace be upon him) was the first believer and Muslim and that line on the paper represented the Islamic path which I walked. My view, I explained, was that whoever walked that straight path as indicated by the Prophet (peace be upon him), whether Sunni or Shi'ite, was with me and I was with him, and that first and foremost I was a Muslim before I was Sunni or Shi'ite and that meant that I based my life on the teachings of the Quran and Sunna.

He said he would like to ask me the question in a different way and when I agreed he asked straightforwardly what my opinion of Al-Qaida was. I enquired whether that was what he had been trying to establish from the beginning and he agreed that it was. My reply was that according to Islamic law, almighty God enjoins us not to follow anything about which you do not have all the facts (Al-Isr'a:36). This injunction is absolutely clear. A Muslim should not accept any ideology or join any group about which he does not have all the information necessary to make a judgment. I said that I did not have enough information about the organization to express any opinion one way or the other. I said that if he brought me members of Al-Qaida and allowed me to question them, the answers to which would enable me to form an opinion about what they stood for. In the absence of that opportunity, it would be against Islamic law and contrary to all logic, and

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hence irrational, for me to take a stand on a group I knew so little about. He asked if I was saying that I did not know of them and I replied that the only knowledge I had came from television and I had no way of determining whether what was said was true or not, how much of what was reported to have been said by Al-Qaida was authentic and how much was untrue. I told the interrogator that I had no knowledge of the membership and did not have any contacts with them and not knowing them meant I could not judge them. Any more than it would be right for me to make a judgment about the actions of anyone else that I did not know. He said that I had answered his question and moved on to another topic. I was asked what my position was on terrorism. I said that before I could reply to the question I needed to know how he defined terrorism. His definition was terrorism was the widespread violence being perpetrated at that time with people being killed and blown up unlawfully. My opinion was, and is, that the unlawful killing of anyone, Muslim, American or infidel, was abhorrent and anyone who killed unlawfully was to be condemned but I asked that he clarify what he meant by unlawful killing. My view was that terrorism had to be explained in detail and I gave him my definition of the term.

I said that the word terrorism was a French term coined during the French Revolution by the Revolutionaries who labelled all those who did not support them as terrorists. At the time of the French Revolution it became common for revolutionaries to stigmatise any opponents by the use of the term terrorist and often these terrorists were punished in the most severe ways possible, including beheading by guillotining. Robespierre was particularly savage with anyone he considered to be against the Revolution. My point to my interrogator was that the term terrorist was a Western one and had

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no counterpart in Islamic thought. The idea of imposing an idea or opinion by the exercise of brute force on another did not exist within Islam and, indeed, the whole concept was horrifying to any true Muslim. To me, I explained, Muslims were being tarred by this brush when the concepts were alien to Islam and were in fact totally Western in origin.

We talked about fundamentalism and I was asked whether I was an Islamic fundamentalist. I told them that the way he put this to me was in the form of an accusation with the implication that there was something inherently wrong in being a fundamentalist. I was clear in my description of myself as an Islamist and a Muslim. He pressed me on this issue and asked me to define what a fundamentalist was. I pointed out that the term fundamentalist was also used to describe some Christian groups in Europe and America, many of which wanted a return to what they considered to be the true teachings of the Church. Many of those teachings are not compatible with scientific logic or, to some, even rational. Nonetheless, many of those groups sanctioned the spilling of blood if it promoted their cause and they often justified their actions by quoting from scripture. Again from my perspective, the term, in this case fundamentalism, was a Western concept with little relevance to Islam. I stated categorically that we were not fundamentalist, we were Islamist. He then moved on to the topics of secularism and democracy. He wanted to know how I perceived democracy to which I replied that democracy was a political system that had both good and bad points, and certainly was less evil than dictatorship but had many failings when compared to Islam. He asked me to expand on that point. I did so by referring to those European Parliaments that had legalized same sex marriages. I argued that this was one of the products of a parliamentary

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democracy, that is, that the representatives had the power to legislate on literally anything they chose. Their justification would always be that they were the elected representatives of the people and could enact laws they believed were in the best interests of those who had elected them. I said that, on the contrary, in Islam, we consulted about issues. Some may think that this is similar to democracy but consultancy in the Islamic context is based on what almighty God says: "And those… whose affair is [determine by] consultation amongst themselves"(As-Shura:38). Muslims are free to consult on matters whenever there is not a clear text from Quran or the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him) available. However, they cannot destroy the fabric of Sharia law. For example, in Islam stealing is prohibited, unlawful killing is prohibited, oppression is prohibited, and the occupation of other people's land is prohibited. These prohibitions cannot be altered. Where there is room for interpretation within the framework of the legal texts, consultation can occur and judgments can be made.

I summed up by saying that we had shura or consultation while they had democracy. Our consultation, I argued, is bound by Islamic Sharia law, which are the pillars and boundaries of our system as handed down by Almighty God whereas democracy was unrestrained in its pursuit of what the people, or more exactly, their representatives wanted or desired.

We talked about this topic a great deal, along with the history of Europe and how millions of people were killed in the Religious Wars between Catholics and Protestants. We also talked about the Inquisition and how many Muslims and non-Christians were killed simply because they did not believe in the Church's teachings.

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One of the last remarks of that particular interrogator to me was that his perception of Islam had radically changed following my conversations with him. He complimented me on my knowledge of Europe, its history and its ideas, and my understanding of beliefs other than my own. I asked him what his perception had been of me before we spoke and he said that he had assumed that I had knowledge only of the Quran. I said that while I believed the Quran held the ultimate truth, I read many other works because I believed that you had to understand not only truth but false doctrine too. He asked me if he could ask a personal question, which was how I could justify having had two wives in the past. I was taken aback somewhat by the jump from discussing quite deep philosophical matters to what was essentially a more private matter. He acknowledged the private nature of the question but I told him that I was happy to respond. In essence, I explained that under Islamic law a man could marry up to four wives but it was unlawful to commit adultery with hundreds of women. In Islamic law, it is better for a man to have four wives lawfully rather than take many mistresses. It is important in the Islamic tradition that children know who their father is. His face turned bright red and he said that he had one wife and had never taken a woman outside his marriage. I replied that that was his choice but I believed that his attitude was not the same as many men in Europe and America towards relationships outside marriage. He countered by saying that the Christian religion allowed a man to take only one wife and I said that that was the problem with that rule, it produced what anyone could see in the West, a situation where many men had one lawful wife and hundreds of unlawful ones. In Islam, however, a man could have up to four wives lawfully and so there is no need to take unlawful

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ones. I agreed that I had two lawful wives and was not in the least abashed by that, as I believed that this was, and is, better for a man, a woman, for the family, for society, for this life and the next life.

Q: It appeared that the interrogation turned into an intellectual dialogue. Is that the case?

Ali Bapir: Yes, he said that himself and told me that he enjoyed the intellectual and political dialogues with me and that they helped him understand me and my perceptions about life, politic, ideas and morality.

After he had finished his questioning I saw him on one more occasion, at which time he said that he had finished his interrogations with me but wanted to have a conversation. He told me that his conclusion was that I was innocent of any wrong doing and that the accusations against me had been fabricated but he wanted to know me and Islamists more fully. He said that many of the things I had told him were new to him and that he had not appreciated how open Islamists could be and how aware they were of other cultures and ideologies. I told him that I had read all 3000 or more pages of the Torah and the Gospel, as well as many books on Europe and other world ideologies. I also mentioned that I had written books on secularism, democracy, globalization, terrorism, and human rights, as well on other current intellectual issues. I emphasized that Muslims were very aware of others' ideas and beliefs.

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Q: This conversation seems, to some extent, to have been very special for both of you. Did you have this kind of conversation with any other interrogators?

Ali Bapir: In the beginning, I did not touch on intellectual or philosophical matters. They wanted specific answers to specific questions but it became clear to them that my answers were always consistent and I kept giving them the same replies over and over again or, depending on the question, perhaps providing a little more clarification to an answer I had previously given. They asked about the Islamic Group; I described it for them. They asked about my views on Ansar; I talked about that. They wanted to know my opinion of the regime; I gave it. When they asked me what I envisaged the future of Iraqi Kurdistan to be, I said that my aspiration was to have an Islamic entity in Iraqi Kurdistan as I believed almighty God had commanded us to bring about. He commanded Muslims to promote their religion in their own countries, and this was the basis of our program and our ultimate goal. I never hid this from them and when I was asked if I insisted on an Islamic government in Kurdistan, I did not dissemble and answered truthfully that that was the outcome I was working towards. They pointed out that it was this stance that was keeping me in detention because they interpreted my aspirations as being indicative of a belief in other matters that concerned them. I replied that whether I was kept in prison or not my views were my views and I had stated them openly and honestly and did not regret anything I had said because I knew that what I believed came from Allah. From my perspective, it was not for the Americans to determine my position. I worked with political factions towards political power not for its own sake but in order to be in a position to implement God's laws and the principles of

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my religion. In the beginning, the questions were more about intelligence gathering but later they took a more political and intellectual direction.

Q: There is no doubt that the Western, particularly American, images of Muslims and Islam are distorted. To what extent do you think your conversations shed some light on Islam and Islamic history? To what extent did they influence the interrogators' views of Muslims?

Ali Bapir: I do not want to sound arrogant but I do think what I said had an impact on them and they seemed genuinely surprised at some of the things I told them about Islam, to the extent that one said to me that he intended to study Islam.

I talked about many things that cannot be detailed here. One of them asked how I thought an Islamic entity could be established and I said our Prophet (peace be upon him) built an Islamic state without shedding a drop of blood, that he invited people and enlightened them, he gave them guidance, he informed people about his message and following that people came and made a covenant with him. At the time of the first and second Aqaba pledges, the people of Medina, which was then called Yathrib, comprised the Aws and Khazraj tribes. Their representatives came and made a covenant with the Prophet (peace be upon him), accepted him as the leader of their political entity, and declared the Islamic state. I said that I was convinced that an Islamic state based on an Islamic society would come about after passing the stages of invitation, education, upbringing, and the spreading of awareness among people. I said that all of the Prophets (peace be upon them), without exception, began their missions through preaching. None ever initiated vio-

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lence though, of course, they responded if attacked. I can find no examples of a Prophet (peace be upon them) who started any conflict. I told them that I believed that when this entity was eventually established it would have to be defended as God's message, must be conveyed to all people, and barriers to that goal must be removed. However, the establishment of an Islamic state had to be based on the invitation, declaration, and conviction of the people founding it.

I clarified my position in detail, quoted verses from the Quran and recited the Prophetic traditions to them. They often asked for further explanations of the verses and traditions and had the translator repeat my answers so that they could understand the meaning of passages. I felt that there was an internal change in a number of them but they were my interrogators and so it was unlikely that any would ever come to me and say that they had converted to Islam. I do believe, however, that I influenced some and changed their opinions about Muslims. With regard to trends within Islam, I reiterated my caution that they must not judge all Muslims by the actions of a few. I tried to make them realise that each Muslim had to be looked at in terms of his individual beliefs rather than assuming that all believed exactly the same way.

Q: Comparatively speaking, how deep was their understanding of your points? In your conversations, for example, on European and Islamic history, was the conversation one sided, or did they contribute?

Ali Bapir: They participated in our discussions but believe me, they did not have enough knowledge of their own history or the issues we talked about. When I was defining the term terrorism and when I was explaining fundamentalism, that this was their term, one of them said that up until then

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he had thought it derived from Arabic. I said that that was not the case and that they, and words such as secularism, were definitely western concepts and had no relationship to Arabic or any other language spoken in the Islamic world.

They had very little knowledge of Islam. Some of them had very limited information but none had any in depth knowledge or understanding of our religion.

Q: We will cover the specific topic of torture and punishment separately but were any of the interrogations accompanied by violence?

Ali Bapir: Yes, in the beginning, in the first 9 days and in the second stage up to 40 days. That lasted a few days but generally they used psychological pressure. They threatened that I would be taken to Guantanamo, that they would imprison my family with me, that I would never be freed and that I would never see any of the Islamic Group again. They repeated these threats on many occasions and constantly told me that I was sacrificing myself for something that no longer existed and that I should just tell them everything they wanted to know. I remained steadfast and said that what would be would be and that if God wanted me to see the Islamic Group again then I would. As far as Guantanamo and the other threats were concerned, my view was that if God willed those things to happen then so be it. God determines what happens to you and I kept telling them that. They told me that I had a strong belief in God but expected a great deal from him, sentiments that I agreed with as I believed that God has control over all things. Their attitude was that while they might believe in God, they did not believe that God was involved in everyday life or had a personal relationship with individuals. I totally disagreed with those opinions and I explained that I

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saw myself as a servant of a merciful God who tells us that he is the friend of believers and their supporters. I even regarded my imprisonment as God's will and, therefore, there had to be some good that would come out of my experiences in prison. Certainly my faith became stronger than ever. During our discussions about spiritual matters I was asked my views on the Christian Holy Book, that is the Bible consisting of the Old and New Testaments, which I had read. I told my interrogators that I believed that some of what was contained in the Bible was the revealed word of God but that much of it I considered to be superstition and that it was these superstitious aspects that had led to the adoption of the secular lifestyle so prevalent in the West. I told them that I believed that there were elements of God's truth from which we could all benefit and that these were discussed in the Quran. However, I believed that the Quran is the only true revelation of standards and source of authority on all issues relating to our lives. So, from time to time, they used psychological pressure, and in the stages after the interrogations they used threats.

Sometimes they resorted to petty and mean spirited tactics. On one occasion when I was sitting on a chair, I was told that I had to sit on the floor. I ended up sitting on the floor for nearly three hours while the interrogator sat on a chair. He told me that I must look him in the eye at all times and that I was not allowed to look away. I did as I was instructed and he then asked why I was not blinking! He asked if I thought I was being brave and I asked him what he wanted from me. I told him that his instructions to look at him, not look at him, were childish and one day I told him that I was not a child but a grown man and that his lack of respect for me actually displayed his lack of respect for himself. I made it known to him that I thought that his behaviour towards

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someone who was a prisoner and had no power was demeaning both to me and to him. His response was that he did not intend any disrespect but he wanted me to tell the truth. I said that whether I was on the floor, sitting on a chair, or in my grave, my answers would remain the same. I had only the truth and that he should not give himself a headache trying to change what could not be changed. I pointed out that despite the torture I had never deviated from what I had told them right from the outset of my imprisonment. I suggested that he should read the transcripts of my interrogations and he would see that my answers were always consistent.

Q: The U.S. intelligence services and other agencies that were responsible to Congress, such as the CIA and military intelligence, are now regarded as having failed in their intelligence gathering mission. In relation to the invasion of Iraq, it is now generally accepted that the Americans acted on the basis of false information. Congress set up a committee to review the weaknesses in the work of the intelligence agencies. Based on your experiences of the interrogations you endured, how do you evaluate their techniques and expertise? To put the question another way, how accurate were they in passing on the information you gave them and in the formulation of accusations against you?

Ali Bapir: Every time they asked me questions, it seemed to me that they were reading the questions from printed sheets prepared in the US. The questions were printed in English and the sheets placed in front of them. The questions they asked were from those pre-prepared sheets and some did not appear to have the authority to deviate from the set questions. Some, when they had finished their questions,

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would ask me if I had any comment to make but I always declined. Some did ask questions outside the framework of the set questions they were asking questions but any answer I gave was written down in full. If they had not understood an answer they asked the translator to clarify my answer with me. They claimed that they wanted to be absolutely accurate in their recording of my answers but despite that I could not help but feel that the billions of dollars they had spent through their agencies had not provided them much in the way of good intelligence and that they were poorly informed on many issues. For example, many of those imprisoned with me were interrogated about weapons of mass destruction, biological weapons and the like. They found absolutely nothing, yet remained convinced that the Ba'athist regime had possessed them. They started the war based on that assessment. The only conclusion that could be drawn was that the massive intelligence apparatus of the US had been deceived by those who furnished them with information that ultimately proved to be baseless. I talked to those who had been interrogated and they confirmed that the Americans had discovered nothing in relation to weapons of mass destruction. The interrogators tortured some of the Ba'athist leaders that they suspected had information but they still found nothing. Later, I learned from some of those prisoners that the Americans had admitted to them that they had been mistaken in their belief that the regime had access to weapons of mass destruction. It seems that they finally realised that if the regime had been telling the truth then they had been lied to by their own informants.

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Q: In the room in which you were first interrogated, what did you see around you?

Ali Bapir: I did not see anyone in uniform, everyone wore civilian dress. It seemed that they were mainly American intelligence and security personnel with translators who were Arabic speaking Americans or English speaking native Arabic speakers.

Q: What was in the interrogation room? Was there a table?

Ali Bapir: Initially there was no table but later they brought a table and a chair. I was interrogated alone.

Q: So there was no chair or table?

Ali Bapir: No, sometimes there was not. In some of the rooms in which I was tortured I was ordered to sit in a corner until the interrogator was ready to recommence the torture.

Q: During the interrogation did they ever bring in either your books or your speeches to use as evidence against you?

Ali Bapir: No, they did not do that but once I was asked about a comment which they interpreted as anti-American that I had made in a speech. I said that I had compared George Bush to a pharaoh and that I was perfectly happy to say it again. I asked them whether it was not George Bush who had said, "Whoever is not with us is against us!"? And to me this concept that anyone who did not support you was against you was the basis of the declarations of war by the Americans. The notion that anyone who was not American or supported American policies was therefore an enemy was erroneous. The Americans took a simplistic view of the world being made up of two camps, the one with America and its

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allies and the other with its enemies. This was exactly the same position taken by one ancient pharaoh who had said that only he spoke the truth and that only he could determine the correct paths: "Pharaoh said: 'I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct'"(Ghafir:29). In other words, what I say is true and should be accepted by everyone as such. He commented that it was a widely held opinion that Islam also took that position of infallibility but I contradicted him, saying that this contention was baseless for in Islam our view was based on the Saba: "And indeed, we or you are either upon guidance or in clear error"(Saba:24). I told him that Islam says that whatever God has said is the absolute truth but no Muslim says that his personal opinion, thoughts, or ideas is the absolute truth. In other words, Muslims are open to discussion and debate so that by investigation of all the evidence a consensus as to what is the truth can be arrived at (Al-Name: 64 and Al-Imran:64).

Q: Did they know the actual texts? Had they memorized them or did they have copies with them?

Ali Bapir: They interpreted what I had said. They said I had described America as an occupier and that I was unhappy with the American occupation of Iraq. I said, once again, that I did not welcome the fact that America was occupying Iraq. I believed that American intervention to depose the regime had been unnecessary as Allah would have ensured its demise without interference. My objections were that Iraq was a Muslim country and the Americans had no right to be here. In my opinion, we had to solve this issue by ourselves. American help would be welcome but not to the extent of occupying our country. The Americans referred to themselves

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as occupiers. Helping us to topple the regime was acceptable but after that we should have been allowed to make our own political decisions and make the changes we felt were appropriate. The reality, however, was that the US had come, by its own admission, as an occupying force and whether they accepted that or not, it remained a fact. After several discussions along these lines, they gave up referring to the issue. I told them that if they wanted corroboration of my views then they should ask their Kurdish spies and informants that they relied on for information to look at my books, especially A Few Popular Issues of this Age in which I described terrorism, secularism, and democracy and evaluated each. In my books I also talked about globalization and my view that it had advantages and disadvantages, and about human rights. I suggested to the Americans that they or their informants should read my books and they would see that I was saying exactly the same things to them now as I had in my publications. They said that they would read them but I do not know if they ever did have them translated.

Q: Was it only one person that interrogated you at a time or were there several? If the latter, was there one interrogator in overall charge?

Ali Bapir: Sometimes there were 3 or 4 people. It looked to me that they had some kind of shift system and teams changed. It makes me laugh now when I look back on it. One black American interrogator had a particularly scary face but it was his personal morality that was more frightening than his appearance. He had a very rough and harsh approach and would demand that I not speak to him until he had finished what he wanted to say. I went along with this and he proceeded to talk at me in English for nearly fifteen

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minutes. When I was eventually allowed to speak I told him that I did not understand more than a few words of English and that I had not understood anything of what he had just said. He refused to believe me and was adamant that I spoke English. I retorted that I did not and that he was wasting his time and mine. There were four other interrogators in at the same time and the translator asked me what I was saying. I repeated that I did not understand what had been said by the interrogator and that it had all been a waste of time. He then inexplicably asked me how it was that I did not understand what had been said and I told him that I would understand if he translated for me. He asked how he was supposed to translate everything that had been said over that fifteen minute period. I was rather surprised by his question but later I realized that he was under enormous psychological pressure himself. The interrogator told me that he was sure I understood him perfectly well because when he spoke I looked at him whereas I did not look at the translator when he spoke. I said that was not the case, as if I had been able I would have looked at the translator when he was speaking so that I could more clearly understand his translation but that I had been ordered, by him, to look only at the questioner and nowhere else. I believe that this is a fairly common interrogation technique, possibly allowing the interrogator to observe any facial changes or eye movements as part of some kind of psychological evaluation.

Q: Were they sensitive about the use of the term "occupier"?

Ali Bapir: Yes, though I remarked that I thought they used the term themselves. I knew that they had described themselves as occupiers at the UN and had asked to be considered and dealt with as such under the relevant laws applied to that

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status. They agreed that this was the case and I said that this just confirmed the reality of the situation.

They continued to ask questions to determine where I stood on issues such as what I thought they should do and what I thought the future held. I replied very honestly that I believed that given their current way of thinking that the future looked quite bleak. They wanted clarification as to why I thought that and I told them that they had not yet resolved the problems in Afghanistan and yet here they were adding to the issues that they had to deal with. I suggested that their difficulty was that they constantly thought in terms of military solutions to the issues they faced. I told them that the British were smarter than them as they thought in political rather than military terms. For me, the Americans saw things in terms of might and muscle power but I argued that this simply added to their burdens. Trying to control the world through muscle was, to me, a backbreaking task and one that was doomed to failure. Sometimes I expressed my surprise that they did not operate in a way more akin to our political leaders and one day one of them said that he thought I had the truth of it and that indeed the Americans were breaking their backs to no avail. Others would say that they regarded me as an honest man and believed what I was saying about their own position was true.

Q: What made them angry or exasperated?

Ali Bapir: They were annoyed because from their perspective I kept repeating myself. I replied that two plus two makes four, now, in the past, and in the future, and simply asking the same questions over and over again was not going to elicit any different answers because the truth did not change. I refused to give them meaningless answers. I insisted on tell-

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ing them as it was. They tried different approaches, one of which was to ask me to tell them about myself. I asked them what the point of that would be and that if they had a political issue they wanted to deal with then they should just say so and we could discuss it. They wanted to know if I had any information that would be important to them and I said that they knew that I did not.

Q: Was their information about Kurdistan, the Islamic Group, and its leadership, accurate?

Ali Bapir: I did not believe so. They mostly asked questions such as how many there were in the political bureau, how many members made up the leadership group and where our bases were located. Sometimes they asked about the PUK, the KDP, and other political parties but I told them to ask them themselves. If there was something already in the public domain I was happy to tell them but otherwise I did not think that it was my place to provide them with information.

Q: Were you ever accused of an actual incident or event?

Ali Bapir: No, never.

Q: How would you rate, in general terms, how you were treated by the different investigators? For example, were the British and American approaches different?

Ali Bapir: The Americans were very harsh but the British were more flexible. In the beginning, they could be tough too but generally they were more sympathetic to me following my arrest. At one point the two groups of interrogators argued amongst themselves about whether what I was saying or had written was true or not. Some Americans seemed more inclined to use torture to force a confession.

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One of the Americans introduced himself to me as Abu Omar. He spoke Arabic fluently and he told me quite openly that there were two schools of thought about me. He said that he believed that I was innocent of the accusations made against me but that some of his colleagues did not share his opinion. On one occasion when I was being tortured he came and ordered that my ill treatment be stopped. He seemed genuinely angry and a quarrel broke out between them. He came to see me later to tell me that they would not listen to him and that they intended to carry on as before. He said he believed that they would eventually realise that I was telling the truth. Of course, I have no way of knowing whether he was genuinely sympathetic towards me or whether it was all just part of some elaborate intelligence technique devised to gain my confidence. I did feel, however, that the occasional disputes that they had between themselves were genuine, especially in the beginning, perhaps less so later.

Q: Were there any others who were sympathetic and held similar perceptions of you?

Ali Bapir: Some others. When I talked about fact and reality there were those who interacted with me. One in particular often told me that he agreed with my standpoints and that those who had arrested me had been mistaken in doing so. He asked me if I had been tortured and when I replied that I had, he seemed concerned and apologized that he did not have the power to release me. So to answer your question, yes, there were those who were sympathetic to my plight.

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Q: Mamosta, did they bring you a Bible or did you ask for a copy?

Ali Bapir: No, a fellow prisoner, and a friend, Doctor Sattam Al-Quad, had a copy. He was not a Ba'athist but he was wealthy and had been accused of co-operating with the resistance movement. The copy he had was 2000 pages long and included a practical explanation of the new testament which was a further 1000 pages. I read all of it in prison. What amazed me was that the guards and interrogators told me that they had never read their Bible but, on reflection, I realised that perhaps I should not be too surprised at that given their attitudes to other things.

Q: Mamosta, how did they address you?

Ali Bapir: They called me Mr Bapir or 117.

Q: What did that refer to?

Ali Bapir: It was my prison number. Inmates were often called by their numbers but if they wanted to appear to be treating me more kindly or with more respect they would call me Mr Bapir, Mr Ali or Sheikh Ali. More often, they simply avoided the issue and did not use any name or number at all, especially in the beginning when they seemed incapable of offering even minor consideration or acts of kindness.

Q: During the interrogation, did interrogators give you any information? For example, did they tell you about the activities undertaken by the Islamic Group such as the demonstrations and protests on your behalf?

Ali Bapir: They did not tell me anything specifically but when they spoke to me I could discern that they had learned

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something about me and I could, on occasion, work out what that was. For example, I was told by one that I must be an important person and I was asked why the people loved and respected me so much. I answered that they would have to ask others about that as I could not provide the answer. However, from that type of question I could assume that things were happening outside the prison that were bringing my name to their attention. I realised from what they said that there must be some kind of movement on my behalf working for my release.

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TOPIC 5 ABUSE and TORTURE

3/07/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Mamosta, in the beginning of this series of conversations you told us that from the beginning of your imprisonment, and for some days following, you were subjected to brutal torture. Could you tell us about this period in more detail?

Ali Bapir: In the name of God, the most Gracious and the most Merciful, there are two types of torture, psychological torture and physical torture. In fact, psychological torture is more damaging, in my opinion, and that is probably true for most people. Emotional or psychological torture began from the time of my arrest, when we were on our way to Dokan and were ambushed by the Americans. We were handcuffed and blindfolded in a very harsh and painful way. I still have the marks on my wrists made by the handcuffs which were far too tight. One of the others who was similarly handcuffed was in pain for several days due to injuries to his arms and shoulders. We were kept handcuffed and blindfolded for hours and they were only removed around midnight.

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When they took us by helicopter to Mosul, and later when they flew us to Baghdad, we were not subjected to any torture as such. After about 24 hours they separated me from the others and it was then that the torture began in earnest. I cannot say that they used all the various types of torture that I know others suffered, and I accept that I could have been tortured to a greater extent than I actually was, but I did have to endure very unpleasant experiences and both physical and psychological abuse. In my case that abuse took different forms. The first was sleep deprivation. The second was being made to stand for hours on end or to stay on my knees while a bottle, or a container full of water, or just something very heavy, was placed on my head. The only respite I was given, which was painful in itself, was to kneel on the hard concrete resting on my elbows until they decided I had to either stand back up or resume kneeling in an upright position.

In the beginning, sleep deprivation was the main weapon of torture. I was told that as I was not giving the answers they sought they would carry on and increase my torture until I did. I replied on every occasion that I had nothing more to tell them and that I would not lie whether they increased my torture or not. I repeated again and again that what I had told them was the truth and I could not change the truth just to avoid the pain they were inflicting on me. One night they shone a projector into my eyes. I had been standing for hours, with something heavy on my head, or kneeling on the floor on my elbows. I was utterly exhausted and was desperate to sleep. I was also extremely thirsty. It was July, and very hot, and the very little water I was given was warm. The projectors generated not only intensely bright light but also greater heat than an electric fire. The result was that on these occasions I was covered in sweat, dehydrated and thoroughly

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worn out. On one particular night from about the time of evening prayer until the beginning of the morning prayer, not only was I subjected to what had become normal treatment but they also hit my knees and elbows with some kind of metal implement. The pain was excruciating and although I had never been unconscious in my life, I prayed that Allah might render me unconscious or even take my soul to him. I never did become unconscious and so had to endure the pain the whole time these sessions went on. I remember praying a great deal at these times or alternatively recited the Quran. I recited almost six sections of the Quran during those early torture sessions.

Sometimes they would put a plastic bag over my head so that I could hardly breathe. When I was thirsty I asked for water but they would refuse, even if I was on the point of fainting. If I did sink to the ground, they pulled me to my feet using my beard or ears which was extremely painful. I often became so weak that I could not lift my hands or legs, and when forced to my feet I would as often as not collapse again and then they would kick my feet to make me get up again. During all of this they sometimes put heavy items on my chest, throw boxes at me or, when I was given water, they would tell me to open my mouth and then pour water over my eyes or up my nose, it never seemed to go down my throat.

All of these abuses were very hard to endure. In summary, what I remember most is the heat and the unbearably loud drum music which they played during these sessions. They brought a woman to dance and told me I had to watch her, all the time insulting me in Kurdish. These persecutors were all American although I suspect that they had been given

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instruction by a Kurdish spy but I cannot confirm that as I was blindfolded for so much of the time. After almost 9 days of this treatment, and after they had transferred me, I lost my appetite. I was unable to eat or even drink water. If I had known, as I do now, that there was hot water available I would have drunk it. My friends were concerned about my health and warned me that if I did not eat and drink I could die. I realise now that what they were telling me was true. One day, Mamosta Dara brought me a tin of canned fruit and told me I had to eat. I told him I just could not and that I felt full all the time. My friends did not know about the torture I had been subjected to at that time and I told them of it. I thank God that they seemed to be in good health. When I was able to sit I prayed. As there was no water, I used tayammum to clean myself. I did not know the time but I estimated as best I could to work out my prayer times. Finally, they moved me. The psychological torture was for me far harder than the physical torture. I did become very tired but I did not care about that. When they abused me verbally, slammed me to the ground, or punched me with their fists, this is what weighed heavily on my heart, as did their repeated accusations that I was a liar. Those actions and accusations saddened me enormously and I told them vociferously that I had never lied in my life. Following the 9 days of continual physical and mental abuse my whole body was black and blue and the skin from my nose and forehead had peeled away. My injuries were so severe that the scars could be seen on my face and a female nurse was concerned enough to take me for medical treatment after deciding that I was as ill as I said. She asked me how I had come to the point where I could not eat or drink and my clothes were torn. She got me to lie down and called for a doctor. I was also embarrassed because I had

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not had a shower for 9 days and my body was dirty. I could not help that because there was no water with which to wash. When the doctor examined me he said that I was in a serious condition and asked me where I had been and how I had come to be in such a state. I smiled and told them that was because his colleagues had received me so warmly. I asked him, how could those whose religion advocated offering hospitality to all treat a guest in this way?

Later, when I was standing during his examination, I felt dizzy and was about to fall. He said that my heart rate was 200 and he was surprised that I had not died. I said that only God could decide such matters and that if God did not wish to take your soul then you would not die. The doctor warned me that my kidneys were about to stop functioning as there was practically no liquid in my body, so I was severely dehydrated. He commented that I looked as if I had been broiled! I said I agreed. What I had been through was something very akin to that. He ordered that I be given fluid intravenously and I was given about 6 bottles of fluid. He said that I had to dink at least 3 bottles of water a day. When I told him I did not think I would be able to drink that amount he asked why and I explained that I had no appetite for either food or water. He told me bluntly that if I did not then my kidneys would stop functioning and I would die. I understood what he was saying but I knew that following the torture I needed help to regain my appetite and ability to drink so I asked for help so that I could eat and drink.

As time went by almighty God gradually cured me, though I did have a serious lung infection for about a month caused by my ill treatment. I had a real difficulty with excess mucus and phlegm. I had been on medication when I was arrested

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but this was stopped. I believed that my interrogators were deliberately withholding my medication despite my requests for help in reducing the extreme discomfort I was in due to the congestion in my lungs. I found it hard to believe that they preferred to leave me to suffer rather than treat my illness, I presume as part of their psychological campaign against me. With God's help I gradually became better and all the areas of my body that had become so painful, my nose and my elbows, recovered. I was able to walk a little better each day and the black and blue bruising slowly disappeared. So that was what life was like at that time, ups and downs, but while I cannot describe everything that happened to me, I think that what I have told you is a reasonable summary and gives you a flavor of the treatment I had to endure.

Q: Were there any electrical shocks administered?

Ali Bapir: No, there were not.

Q: We have seen instruments of torture used in many Arab countries. Were any instruments used in your torture?

Ali Bapir: They did not use such tools as such but staff, they beat and assaulted me. I was kicked all over my body and sometimes when I was on the ground they used a box of some kind to hit me in the chest and stomach which caused me a great deal of pain. I thought at one time that they had broken all my ribs but I survived and came through all of the tortures they inflicted.

Q: Were there any other types of torture that you have not mentioned?

Ali Bapir: What I have told you is a brief summary.

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Q: Mamosta, were you tortured individually or in a group?

Ali Bapir: I was alone but it seems that they brought other brothers to look at me because when I was released I was told by some that they had been brought to see me. I did not see them because I was blindfolded and they had put bags over my head. I believe they brought my brothers to frighten them by showing them what could happen to them if they did not co-operate.

Q: Mamosta, who actually carried out the assaults? Were they soldiers or guards?

Ali Bapir: Actually I did not see them. They wore civilian clothes but I could tell that they were big men, even though I never knew who they were. There were armed soldiers who guarded us but those who tortured me were specialists in such interrogation methods and knew how to cause pain. They were certainly extremely cruel.

Q: Mamosta, while you were undergoing torture did you recite the Quran?

Ali Bapir: I prayed, asking for help, and recited the Quran. They were upset and told me I had to be quiet. When I told them I was only praying, they answered that I was told that I could do so without moving my lips!

Q: In regard to your psychological state, did you feel tranquil at any stage?

Ali Bapir: The calmness I felt when reciting the Quran was rare. There were a few occasions when I felt an extraordinary peacefulness under torture. I do not know how to describe it really. In the middle of this terrible suffering, which was so

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great that I wished for death to release me, I was suddenly overwhelmed by a sensation akin to being showered from on high. It was like being very hot and then being cooled by water. It took away all those pains that I felt in all parts of my body and which had become one huge agony. When this feeling of serenity came over me, I forgot everything. I was surprised, renewed, and at peace all at once. Another time, I was very low and in great physical discomfort as I had been standing for a long time and felt that I was about to faint and fall. I just closed my eyes and this sensation of serenity came over me once again. It was a gift from almighty God who often talks of sending such serenity. For me, this was the second occasion and, once again, I felt reinvigorated, without pain, and this, paradoxically, was the blessing of my imprisonment for it is only there that I experienced such a gift and felt so at peace.

Q: Mamosta, you talked about injuries to your body. Where, precisely, were these injuries and how long did the pain associated with them last?

Ali Bapir: They were in a number of areas; my face, my nose, my ears, and beard when they pulled me to my feet, my hands, which were skinned by the handcuffs, and my knees from prolonged kneeling on the floor. I was hit on the pelvis by something metal to make me stand. My body was black and blue all over from kicking and manhandling me.

Q: Were you deprived of sleep after those initial 9 days?

Ali Bapir: During the second stage, one night they would not let me sleep. They made me stand in the sun, standing for hours. I was thirsty and sick and I was frightened that if I fell where they had ordered me to stand, which was encircled

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with barbed wire, I would seriously injure myself. They said to each other that I should be left where I was until I fell. I prayed and asked them for water to quench my unbearable thirst. They claimed that there was no water and would not be until I told them what they wanted. I said that my answers had already been given and that they would remain the same whether I fell or not, whether they kept me in prison or not. Eventually they could see that they were getting nowhere and took me inside and I asked again for some water.

They still would not do so. My mouth and throat were so dry I could hardly speak and eventually they relented and gave me a little water but only, as they said, to wet my lips so that I could talk. I did that and they demanded that I tell them what they wanted to know. I said that if they wanted me to be able to talk they would have to give me more water but they said I could only have water after I had given them information. They were very mean spirited and spiteful in how they dealt with me and when I castigated them for breaching my basic human rights, rights they so often declared they protected, they simply ignored me and carried on. I saw some childish acts from them and said, you call for human rights protection and you do these things, and I'm a human being and I have right to drink water, many of your actions will not affect me, so if I suffocate or not, what I say to you will remain the same. They claimed that I knew that they did not want to behave as they were but my intransigence left them no option. I repeatedly said that I had told them nothing but the truth and could not in all honesty change or add anything I had already said. They asked me if I thought my stance was just a demonstration of my determination to hold out against them but I denied this.

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Q: Were you forced to say anything under torture that you later regretted?

Ali Bapir: No, I did not, even under torture. They questioned me relentlessly but I kept to my answers and just kept repeating that I had told them the truth and had nothing to add, no matter how many times they badgered me to change what I had said.

Q: When you were in the prison, numerous photographs showing how prisoners had been abused in Abu Ghreb were published. Those photographs showed interrogators and American soldiers humiliating prisoners in a variety of ways, such as stripping them and indulging in inappropriate and immodest behaviour towards the captives. Did anything like that happen to you?

Ali Bapir: No, but one of the prisoners told me that he had been left totally naked for 23 days.

Q: Did they employ methods of psychological torture by being disrespectful to the holy Quran or other aspects of Islam?

Ali Bapir: No, there was no Quran there and I never saw one.

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Q: In an interview with an American radio station, after his release from Guantanamo, one of the prisoners said that he and his fellow prisoners had protested at the lack of respect shown for the Quran by soldiers and guards and that they only gave them shorts to wear for long periods, causing a number of difficulties, particularly in relation to the inappropriateness of praying when not dressed properly. Did you face any such challenges?

Ali Bapir: No, it neither happened to me or anyone I asked except for the one I have already mentioned who belonged to the Mukhabarat. He also claimed that his toenails and fingernails had been torn out and that he had been threatened with castration. I spoke to another prisoner who had had 6 teeth broken during interrogation but as regards myself the only disrespect to which I was subjected was the bringing two women that I was ordered to watch. No doubt they learned some Kurdish words as I expressed my dissatisfaction with their behaviour! Other than that, I did not personally see any instances of disrespect. Certainly the abuse I suffered at their hands, such as pulling my beard and ears to make me stand, was extremely disrespectful and humiliating but I never heard them utter any insults against the Quran, Allah or Islam.

Q: As you were not subject to some of the humiliations suffered by others, such as that suffered by the prisoner who had his teeth broken, why have you mentioned them?

Ali Bapir: I put the fact that I was only subjected to what I could cope with down to Allah's kindness and favor. He judged what I could bear. With regards to the young man who was a member of the regime, perhaps he was treated differently for that reason or possibly because he had been captured during battle, whereas I had been invited to a meeting

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and then arrested. Perhaps that was taken into consideration in my case, through Allah's good grace.

Q: Apart from the actual torture itself, what other kinds of monitoring were you subjected to while you were in the room they used to conduct their interrogations?

Ali Bapir: From the time I was taken to the room until my return to my cell, a guard came every half hour. If he could not see me, perhaps because I was in a corner, he would demand that I show myself. Ali Hassan Al-Majid experienced some difficulties using the toilet as he had problems with his legs. One day, when he was in the toilet, the guard could not see him and asked him what he was doing to which he replied he was doing what anyone did in a toilet, what did he expect? Some of the guards would come every half hour, night and day, to see what you were doing and write their observations down. When those guards were on duty this meant there were 48 times in a 24 hour period when we were asked what we were up to. If you did not appear immediately, the guard would call you. Sometimes the window was shut so tightly, or if you were sleeping soundly, then you would not hear the call and then you would be woken up, usually by a bright torchlight in your eyes. Not all of them were like that but those that did seemed to me to be full of hate. Checking on the odd occasion is one thing; 48 times a day is another!

Q: Did this happen throughout the 22 months of your imprisonment?

Ali Bapir: Yes, it was like that until I was released. Another humiliation was that we were forced to gather used cigarette ends and if we refused we were deprived of recreation time. In the beginning we were not allowed to greet one another

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and if anyone did he lost his recreation period. Sometimes, though not always, we were prohibited from washing our hands and faces, with or without soap, or they would allow us to wash our hands but not our faces and, again, anyone who refused to comply was punished by the deprivation of his time outside.

These deprivations of time outside to exercise were the worst punishments, particularly given that in the beginning we were locked up for 23 hours a day and our only time outside of our cells was the 2 half hour recreation slots. Again, in the beginning, when there was no electricity and at night, or when the shutters on the windows were locked, we were in darkened cells for very long periods of time. The time outside, of course, became very precious to us. All you could do in the cells at those times was remember Allah. The sight of some prisoners was weakened by the prolonged time spent in darkness. You can understand that losing this precious time washing our hands, even though we were covered in dust, dirt and insects, was very important to us. They took no account of the fact that we were in a desert area and to avoid the loss of our recreation time we usually just obeyed their instructions.

Q: In your opinion, why did the soldiers and interrogators abuse you in these ways? Was there, perhaps, an element of racism that we see so often in the Western world involved? Do you think they were instructed to behave in the way they did? Was this abuse, in your view, simply a means of extracting information?

Ali Bapir: Probably all these factors were combined to some extent. They were clearly ordered to behave as they did because later in my imprisonment they changed their behavior, indicating that they were acting on instruction. There is

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no doubt that the mood of an individual guard played a large part in how we were treated. There were those who were particularly mean spirited and others who showed some flexibility and would allow a certain amount of discussion between ourselves as long as we were not too loud. I cannot give details of every situation but, for example, early on we had to finish our ablutions within 2 or 3 minutes, and a bath in no more than10 minutes, which included the time to undress and dress. If you did not keep to the schedule, the guard harangued you. Often we had to finish off, even if we were covered in soap suds, but when a kinder guard was on duty he would give us 5 more minutes so that we could clean ourselves properly. I still remember one night, when we had completed our ablutions and were allowed outside, one guard asked us why we were in such a hurry to go back inside! He told us to enjoy the air. Some were kind in that way and those were the ones who would also allow us to talk together for a few minutes. The individual moods of the guards were a major factor in their treatment of us.

Q: Did you at any time feel that the abuse you were subjected to was motivated by religious hatred? On the other hand, did you ever feel that kinder treatment was motivated by the personal religious beliefs of those guarding you?

Ali Bapir: Yes, there were some among them that did seem to be motivated by their personal religious beliefs, for good or ill, but in general that was not the case. There were Jews amongst the guards and one fanatical Christian who was full of hatred who often punished us for no reason. Some of my fellow prisoners told me that some of the Jewish guards could be very nasty but in general the guards attitude was more one of warning us to obey the rules as otherwise they would have no alternative but to punish us as they had been

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ordered because if they did not, they would themselves be sanctioned. Basically, we were at the mercy of the moods and attitudes of the guards.

Q: Did anyone die under torture?

Ali Bapir: As far as I know, no, but it is possible it happened somewhere else, but I do not know.

Q: Did they, during the torture, accuse you of being involved in killing Americans?

Ali Bapir: They did not accuse me of that. I do not know if they made such a claim to others. They had no information or proof about any such accusations.

Q: To what extent has the abuse, punishments, torture and humiliations had a psychological impact on you?

Ali Bapir: In what respect?

Q: You said that one of the Americans accused you of lying, something you had never experienced before. To what extent did this leave a lasting negative impact on you?

Ali Bapir: A great deal, of that there is no doubt. In my whole life this was the first time I had ever been arrested and accused of lying. The manner of my arrest, through trickery, also contributed to my feelings of hurt and confusion. There were the aspects of my treatment that I thought merited compensation from the Americans. All of us who were arrested with me suffered persecution and I, as any human being would be, was badly affected by the treatment I received. With Allah's support, I have tried not to dwell on the negative aspects of my imprisonment but instead I have concentrated on the positive outcomes of those experiences,

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such as the opportunity it provided to revisit and consolidate memorization of the Quran, to come closer, to re-evaluate myself, and to deepen my own spirituality and personal piety. By concentrating on these benefits that flowed from my imprisonment, I started to forget those negative aspects.

Your questions make me remember the negative aspects which otherwise I strive to put behind me.

> ***Q: My question was essentially asking you to evaluate the extent to which your experiences in prison had impacted negatively on, for example, your will power and personal determination.***

Ali Bapir: My personal beliefs became even stronger and when I was released, in a press conference, I made comments that some of my secular friends were unhappy about, which was proof, it seemed to them, that I was still the same person as I had been before I was arrested. I remarked that those who thought that an American prison could make me give up my faith and my Islamic principles did not know me. Even if my faith had not become even stronger, deeper, and more embedded, as it did, the experiences could never have weakened it. I believe that a true believer, subjected to hardship and sorrow, becomes stronger in his beliefs through overcoming the trysts put before him. Adversity brings us closer to God and leads to greater understanding of our beliefs. Almighty God blesses him by providing these tests which strengthen his faith and his morality. I believe that Allah has bestowed so many blessings on me that I can never adequately describe, and prison, for all the horrors associated with it, was one of these. My imprisonment was wrong and unlawful but I recall how almighty Allah tempered the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) in the fires of adversity: "Allah said, "O fire! be

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coolness and safety upon Abraham"(Al-Anbia':69). Wrongful imprisonment provided a place where my faith could become complete and bring me nearer to Allah.

Q: Mamosta, I detect in your answers a certain reticence, caution perhaps, in talking in detail about the torture you were subjected to. Why are you reluctant to expand on every detail of your experiences at the hands of the Americans?

Ali Bapir: It is not something I wish to dwell on. It is far from easy to go into details about the 50 or more times I was slammed to the ground. It is not something I can bring myself to do. My experiences were far from pleasant but I have given you an accurate summary of what I went through.

I forgot to mention that when they took me to that doctor and weighed me my weight had dropped to 60kg. When I was arrested my weight was between 75-76kg. This means I lost 15kg in 9 days and this in itself is a very clear indication of the level of physical and psychological abuse to which I was subjected. Any medical practitioner will confirm that losing 15kg in 9-10 days results in you being extremely weak and in considerable distress. No doubt I could have been made even more miserable by such techniques as pulling out my fingernails. Perhaps then I would have lost even more weight, but 15 kg is a great deal to lose so quickly and does have very severe physical and psychological repercussions.

Q: Do you think this savage treatment reflects general American attitudes? Or was the torture carried out by a group of soldiers who were used as tools?

Ali Bapir: I believe that there are good and bad people everywhere. I saw good people among the American soldiers, who criticised the actions of their own country. Some be-

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lieved that they were the pawns of Jews and were being used to defend Israel. There were those who said that once they had returned home, they would never take up arms on behalf of America again. Some said that they were only in the military to make a living and there were others who seemed genuinely sympathetic to our cause. When I called adhan there those were among them who said that they recognized in me a spirituality and some, male and female, then asked if they could talk to me about Islam.

There were also some among them who regarded me as a holy man and expressed their willingness to help me in any way they could and believed that giving such help would be pleasing to God. They were the ones who might provide me with a pen or a notebook without obtaining permission from the prison authorities. One guard provided, at his own expense, 2 notebooks, each of up to 200 pages, when normally through official channels we would be lucky to get one or two sheets of paper. He brought me 4 pens on one occasion but always warned me not to let anyone know what he had done. Another, again at his own expense, since none of us had any money, brought us sweets. He told me his name was Joseph and I thanked him for his kindness and asked him if anyone had told him to do so. He said that his conscience told him that he should and that he thought we were good people and that it made him happy to provide a little kindness to us. He knew we had neither the money nor the opportunity to acquire any small treats and was glad to share what he had, in terms of chocolate or sweets, with us.

I did not have the feeling that the interrogators, in general, hated me. I saw them more as carrying out their duty as they saw it. Some enjoyed being brutal but others clearly did not.

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As with any group of employees, there were good and bad but I felt that the majority saw what they were doing as a duty rather than something they took any pleasure in.

Q: Do you have any information about the torture of Ba'athist leaders, particularly high ranking officials such as Tariq Aziz, Ali Hassan Al-Majid, Taha Yassin Ramadan or Saddam himself?

Ali Bapir: I have no personal knowledge of what happened to Saddam but Ali Hassan Al-Majid told me that they had hurt him. He also told me that they tortured Taha Yassin Ramadan a great deal. There were people who had had their nails torn out and others whose legs or arms were broken but I believe that those surrounding the main figures, the lesser officials, were not subjected to that treatment.

Q: Did any of them describe the type of torture they were subjected to?

Ali Bapir: Yes, several talked about that but we need not go into details. For example, one of them, Abu Zeinab, a Shi'ite brother, affiliated to the Dawa Party, was heard by someone near to him screaming and yelling that he needed to use the toilet and begging to be let out. They would not let him leave the room in which they were torturing him, even when he said that if he was not allowed to go his bladder would burst. They told him that if he wet himself in the room they would punish him but he lost control and the guards literally cleaned up the urine on the floor using his clothes, with him still wearing them. He began to pray but they carried on until he was entirely covered in urine and then told him he could now pray.

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Q: Was it a building or a tent in which you were held for those first 9 days?

Ali Bapir: It was a building.

Q: Did it have windows?

Ali Bapir: They blocked them with wood.

Q: Were there any lights?

Ali Bapir: No, there was not.

Q: Was there any electricity?

Ali Bapir: Yes, there was but occasionally the electricity was cut off.

Q: How did you know the time, date, and whether it was night or day?

Ali Bapir: We guessed. 1 or 2 brothers were in a cell which had a crack so that helped. I had no cracks in my cell so I had no way of telling whether my guesses about the time of day were right or not. The important thing is that I tried to pray 5 times during the day after tayamum, while I was sitting because I was not able to pray standing.

Q. How did you make your determinations about the time of day, or dates?

Ali Bapir: Being in solitary confinement made it very difficult. I originally thought that my initial period of confinement and torture lasted 10 days but it was only later that I learned from others that it was 9. The torture ceased on July 20th. I had calculated that it was July 21.

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TOPIC 6 Friends and Associates among Fellow Inmates

02/07/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Mamosta Ali Bapir, when you were first imprisoned, who were your closest friends?

Ali Bapir: In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, all praises due to Allah, blessing and peace be upon the Prophet, his family and his companion, and on those who follow his guidance. With regard to those who were with me in Camp Cropper prison, I would not describe them as friends because a friend is one who walks with you on the path. They did not share my opinions or share my path. I would characterize them as neighbors, since we were in solitary confinement in cells adjacent to one another and were in the same camp. That is all that brought us together. We shared a geographical space but not values or opinions.

Many of those who were with me in this camp had been senior figures in the previous regime and, in fact, basically all the political and administrative leadership of the previous regime were there. Initially, Saddam Hussein and Ali Hassan Al-Majid, and some of the other leaders, were not imprisoned there but they were brought to Camp Cropper during

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the time I was imprisoned. All the others, however, whether arrested, or who had voluntarily surrendered, were.

Q: Can you tell me any of their names and ranks?

Ali Bapir: Yes, those I remember very well. After I was there for some time they brought Saddam Hussein, let us start with him. There was also Tariq Aziz, Taha Yassin Ramadan, Ali Hassan Al_Majid, the Defence Minister, Sultan Hashim, and the Minister of Oil, whose proper name I do not recall but he was called Abu Fatin. They tended to call each other by their surnames, Abu Fatin was a doctor and I may remember his name later[1]. In addition to these were the then Minister of Military Industry, Abdultawwab Mullah Huaish, the Minister of Trade, Doctor Muhammad Al-Rawi, the Minister of Endowment, Doctor Abdulmunem Attikrity, although he did not like to be called Attikrity and preferred that he was addressed using his father's name. He was a subdued and shy person, a gentleman. There was also the Minister of Agriculture and the Interior Minister. Some of them were released before others. Many of the most senior military leaders, and those who had senior military rank, were also there, including Qais Al-Azzamy, General Farhan Al-Jibouri, and a number of others. There were some Director Generals and senior staff of various agencies, such as the Mukhabarat, the intelligence service, some of whom were related to Saddam. They brought Barzan, one of whom was Saddam's cousin, Watban and Sabawi to the Camp. Saddam's cousin was a military man. Those are the names I remember of prisoners who had held posts in the previous regime. Nearly all of the important figures of that regime were held there, the only exceptions being those that had refused to surrender and had gone into hiding.

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(1) His name was Dr. Amir.

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Q: When you were brought to Camp Cropper, were many of them already there?

Ali Bapir: The majority were there. The majority of the Regional Command Council were there, including Mizban khidr Hadi, Doctor Seyfeddin Almashhadni, Samir An- Najim, and others.

Q: Mamosta, as Saddam was in Camp Cropper too, did you spend time with, see, or talk to him?

Ali Bapir: Saddam was in a different section. Although he was in the Camp Cropper complex, he was in a separate location. We saw him when they took him for interrogation or to the doctor. Sometimes they took him away but we never knew to where. They did bring a security van to transport him and he was always guarded by a squad of soldiers who held him as he was being moved from the prison to the transport. They did the same if he was being taken to the bathroom. A few of his ex-colleagues saw him at various times, but not to talk to as he was kept away from everyone else. When they brought him to the prison they moved him a great deal and the rest of us were on lock down and confined to our cells with windows shuttered. On occasion when he was being moved we were told that we could not stand up in our cells but had to lie on our beds, so that we could not see him. Some did, however, catch glimpses of him through cracks in the walls. At the very beginning there was less effort put into stopping anyone seeing him but as time went on they made it more and more difficult.

At the same time they denied that Saddam was at Camp Cropper. The same guards later confirmed to us that he was in the prison but as a group of inmates we thought it best to

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remain quiet about that and it was only later that the location of Saddam was confirmed to the public.

Q: Was everyone forbidden to see or talk to him or only you?

Ali Bapir: No one was allowed to see or speak to him. If I could just clarify this point for you. Basically everyone was treated exactly the same with regards to any administrative arrangements, food, sleeping, exercise, toilet and bathroom time. The clothes and any necessaries that were brought to us were always the same for everyone. They did not differentiate between prisoners. The guards told us that the food, and other basic items, given to Saddam were exactly the same as the rest of us received. I believe his cell might have been bigger than normal. I heard that his was 4m x 3m and had its own bathroom, although that was built on later. Up until then, he used the same general bathroom we all did.

Q: Was it possible to send a message to Saddam Hussein via the guards? Was there any way in which you could communicate with Saddam?

Ali Bapir: Not with Saddam. They were very strict about that. We did sometimes communicate with other prisoners through a guard, for example to borrow a book, or send some paper, or to deliver a note to the prison authorities asking for permission to ask another prisoner for something. One of my fellow prisoners, Latif Nussayyif Jasim, had a copy of Sahih Al-Bukhari[1]. He was also a member of the Regional Command Council. He had asked me one day what he should read now that he had read the Quran assiduously and

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(1) The most authentic book of the Prophet's tradition.

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I recommended Saheh Bukhari. I learned that he had a son named Doctor Anmar who had also been imprisoned with us but was released before his father. Jasim asked his son to send him a copy of the book, which he duly did. I asked the guards if I could borrow this book and they suggested I write to the prison authorities to ask permission. I did so and was allowed to borrow the book for about a month. A few of the prisoners made private arrangements with the guards who would smuggle a letter out or an item they wanted their family to have but I do not really know the extent of such arrangements.

Some guards helped in this way because they felt sympathy for someone who might be ill, or old and infirm, and were willing to pass on personal messages.

Q: Mamosta, did this situation pertaining to Saddam, that is the isolation from the other prisoners, last throughout the period of your imprisonment?

Ali Bapir: Yes, it lasted until my release.

Q: No one was able to make contact with Saddam through the guards?

Ali Bapir: I do not believe so. According to my information, his guards were hand-picked.

Q: When you did see him, how did he look to you - determined or demoralized?

Ali Bapir: We saw him from a distance and he appeared physically erect, I cannot really say more than that. The guards told us that he was still aggressive and violent and not in any way demoralised.

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Q: Moving on to another topic, you said that there was another Kurdish prisoner, Omer Baziyani, who was one of the leaders of Ansar, in Camp Cropper. We had heard on the news, on an almost daily basis, that the leaders of Al-Qaida, particularly those close to Zarqawi, had been arrested. Were there any other Kurds imprisoned with you, Islamists or those accused of being Islamist?

Ali Bapir: I do not know. I suspect if such arrests were made they would have been brought to Camp Cropper. I did not see any of them other than Omer Baziyani, who was in the prison but after a short time was taken away. I found out from him on his return that they had taken him to Suleimani for interrogation. I spoke to someone who was located near him and he claimed that Baziyani had, in his words, "admitted everything" to his interrogators. After that he disappeared for good. I do not know to where he was taken. As for Islamists, in the last days before my release, I heard that they had a number in the Camp, a mixture of Iraqis and non-Iraqis. However, they separated them to an extent from the rest of us. I do not know who they were, the only thing I know is that they claimed to be Islamists. From what I could see, they were treated more harshly than those of us already there. For example, when they were moving them anywhere they were bundled into carts, they were not allowed to walk, and they were chained. Their treatment was similar to that which we had received when we first arrived in the prison. It is possible that their treatment also became less harsh as time went on but I could not say that with any certainty as I did not know any of that group.

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Q: Among the Ba'athist leaders imprisoned with you, which ones did you spend the most time with?

Ali Bapir: On the first day after being tortured and an initial interrogation, the Americans took me to a hall. It was still pre-dawn, perhaps an hour or an hour and a half before prayers, and there were between 8 and 12 prisoners already there. I had no idea who any of them were. Gradually the sky lightened and I asked some of them if there was any water. I was very thirsty and not in the best physical state. They gave me some water and asked who I was. I told them and they said that they would introduce themselves after prayers. After prayers I learned that one of them was the Minister of Awqaf, that is religious endowments. Then a group comprising members of the Revolutionary Command Council introduced themselves or were identified to me. I was only there for one day before I was taken to a cell where I was held in solitary confinement. Those who were in cells adjacent to me were Mizban Khidir Hadi, called Abu Uruba, who was a member of the Revolutionary Command Council, and on the other side was the Minister of Endowment, who was released after 3 months.

Prisoners were constantly transferred from one place to another and, for example, at the start of my imprisonment, Abu Ahmad, from Basra, was in the cell next to me. After he left Doctor Muhammad Arrawi was put in that cell. Doctor Sattam Alqaood replaced him. He was not a Ba'athist but he was accused of having ties to the regime. He was rich and therefore they suspected him of helping the resistance. After I was transferred to another division, Abdultawwab Mullah Hueish, the Minister of Military Industry, was in the cell next to mine on one side and Ghazi Ubeid on the other. Later, Ali

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Hassan Al-Majid was placed two cells down from me. It was always like that with prisoners coming and going. There was never any stability in that sense. I myself was moved on a number of occasions and with those changes in cell, and the constant change of those near me, I got to know the names of a number of my fellow prisoners but knew the names of far fewer who were housed well away from me.

Q: You opposed the Ba'athist regime all your political life and were even placed on the "Wanted" list. How did you establish relationships with those you had previously opposed? I believe you said you first saw them in the Hall when you were first brought to the prison but could you tell us a little more about how your relationships developed?

Ali Bapir: On that first occasion, when I was in pain and very uncomfortable, and I told them who I was and they introduced themselves to me, they seemed to know who I was. I had heard of several of them as they were prominent members of the regime. They wanted to make the point at every opportunity that, as far as they were concerned, the enemy was America and that past differences should be put aside in order to face the common enemy that had imprisoned us all. I would not agree with them and stated that in my opinion if the regime had not behaved in the way it had we would not be in the situation we now faced. As far as I was concerned, they had paved the way for the American occupation of Iraq. Their view was that there was nothing to be gained by taking such a position and suggested that we should try to get to know one another. I did engage in some fairly controversial conversations with them when the opportunity arose and over time their tone with me became noticeably conciliatory. They treated me almost as a guest and clearly wanted to act

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respectfully towards me. I explained that I was confused by my imprisonment and did not really understand why I had been arrested. They expressed their surprise at my imprisonment too but, of course, had no way of influencing American actions. After the initial weeks when we were not allowed to engage with each other to any extent, and when even a greeting was forbidden, communication became a little easier. Some guards were more tolerant of prisoners talking to one another than others, especially during exercise time. The extent of our communication with each other was very much dependent on the attitude of the individual guard. Any discussions, in consequence, were often rather intermittent in nature. Once exercise time had been gradually increased, to up to 4 hours, there was more opportunity to sit and talk together, as well as pray as a group. That did not happen until about 10 months into my imprisonment. By the end of the first year they were allowing a division, that is groups of 7, to sit together on chairs at tables, and even allowed us to eat lunch together and pray collectively at the appropriate times. From then on there was considerably more time for talking and they got to know me better. Up until that point, they only knew me as the leader of the Islamic Group and, before that, that I had been in the Islamic Movement. They knew that I was a staunch opponent of the Ba'athist regime. They had regarded me as a dangerous enemy as I was a principled man and they knew that I regarded the Ba'athist regime as being composed of Kafirs, unbelievers. I agreed that what they had heard of me in that respect was all true.

That is how we started but gradually they did come to know me and became familiar with my perceptions and thoughts. The doors to conversation and debate were increasingly opened. The combination of increased opportunity to

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communicate and their changing perceptions of me meant that we were able to engage in numerous discussions.

Q: What was the basis of your attitude to these Ba'athist leaders? Did you see yourself as someone offering advice or did you make your views on some of their criminal activities known?

Ali Bapir: I engaged in general conversation and gave advice, but I can say without reservation that I also relayed to them my opinions in exactly the same way as I did in the pulpit. I did, naturally, take into consideration their psychological and emotional states of mind, as well as the circumstances that we all endured in prison.

For example, once a number of ministers and senior officials who were all members of the Revolutionary Command Council were sitting together, I told them that for Allah's sake I had to offer them advice which I said they should consider very carefully. They asked me to go on. I told them that they had made an idol out of Saddam Hussein and in effect worshipped him. I suggested that the statues they made of, and for, him were reminiscent of those of the idols of Lat, Uzza and Hubel, worshipped by Arabs in the days before the advent of Islam. I rebuked them for diverting Iraq's resources to the glorification and deification of a mere man. I said that Islam was based on monotheism, that only Allah could be worshiped, and homage must be done to Allah alone, and only Allah could be lord and a ruler. I criticized them for regarding this one man as everything to them in a way that should be reserved for Allah. I put proofs in front of them, including the time when I was in the Islamic Institute in Suleimani and they had distributed 99 names for Saddam, similar to the 99 beautiful names of Almighty Allah, likening

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Saddam to Allah. Then I talked to them about Khairullah Telfah, Saddam's maternal uncle, who had written a book, Three things God should not have created: Jews, Persians and Flies. I told them that I was appalled at such views, published by their Ministry of Information, and which were in total contradiction of Islamic values. I also referred to how Saddam, in his booklet, A look at Religion and Heritage, in describing Islam, says that Islamic Sharia Law was not a suitable way of organizing ordinary life. I refuted the ideas of Michel Aflaq who describes the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as an Arabic leader that had emerged in Arabic society but denied that he was a Prophet to whom God had revealed his guidance for humanity.

I told them many things of this kind in a frank, and sometimes harsh, manner. To begin with, we had heated exchanges and there was anger on both sides of the debates. Their problem was that they had no foundation, no proofs, for what they claimed to believe could counter my arguments. My opinions were based on the Quran and Sunna, of which they had little knowledge or understanding. I talked about a reality which they had lived through, which they had experienced and, consequently, which they could not deny.

Sometimes they countered my criticisms by claiming that what I was saying was an exaggeration or that I was describing an event that had not happened in the way I said. For example, I raised the issue of chemical warfare and the Anfal process. They denied that either had happened or that the claims had been exaggerated but they offered no contradictory evidence. My position was strong and soundly based on the Quran and Sunna, as well as other corroborated proof.

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You asked about our discussions; there were heated debates but I also offered advice, particularly about matters of faith and religion. I urged them to worship Allah, to pray, and to behave and live according to Islamic values and principles. Even in the most heated discussions, I would often try to advise them.

The advice I offered often involved clarifying and expanding upon relevant facts about Islam. I pointed out that the founder of their party, Michel Aflaq, was a Christian. On one occasion, one of these high ranking officials from the Ba'athist regime argued with me and claimed that he and his colleagues regarded themselves as Muslim but that the Ba'ath party had been established to defend the Arab Ummah, nation. I contradicted him and said that in the first place his use of the word 'ummah' was incorrect in that he used it to refer to Arabs, while the Islamic concept of Ummah is a more developed one which incorporated all those people who shared a common philosophy and worked to achieve a specific goal. I pointed out that modern Arabs had Muslims, Christians, and those of other religions, and none within their ranks, many of whom looked to America, Russia, or even Israel as their model and so the idea of using the term 'ummah' to relate to Arabs was illogical. He maintained that Ummah was exclusively Muslim and that their party had been founded to preserve it. He was a Sayyed and I took him by the collar and asked him that if on the Day of Judgment the Prophet (peace be upon him) came and seized him by the collar, as I had done, and asked him who was regarded as a direct descendant, whether his leader was Michel Alfaq, who had written one book or him, that had left the Quran and the Sunna, what would he reply? I told him that Prophet (peace be upon him) had not left his guidance so that the Ba'ath party could be founded.

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The man started to cry and said that he had not, up until then, thought of things in that way and was now asking himself whether the Ba'ath Party was a religion. I replied that it was because a religion is a system by which people live their lives and he had followed Michel Aflaq's religion and not the religion of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). I had many similar discussions of that kind.

Q: Mamosta, where and when did these occur ?

Ali Bapir: In the same places each time.

Q: In the cells or other areas of the prison?

Ali Bapir: After they took us for exercise, we sat for 2 or 3 hours together, or sometimes we visited each other in our cells. I was quite harsh with them and, as I have said, we had some heated debates but on many occasions I sat talking to one or other of them. I knew that people in a group often find it difficult to accept advice whereas in a one to one situation a person can be more receptive to accepting that they might be wrong. It is not easy to admit that you may have been wrong about such important matters. In those bilateral conversations I was still extremely frank and did my best to clarify points for them. I also dealt with any issue that they raised during those break times but generally I expressed my standpoints to them and in the end most of my conversations, whether about private matters or more general religious issues, were with individuals on their own.

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Q: There is considerable curiosity, both locally and internationally, about the Ba'athist leadership. As Kurds, given our bitter experiences with that regime, there is a particular desire to learn more about the various individuals involved, for example, Ali Hassan Al-Majid. Could you expand a little on your conversations with them, and in particular the details of conversations you had with people such as Ali Hassan?

Ali Bapir: Before coming on to talk about Ali Hassan Al-Majid specifically, I would like to expand on the topics we discussed. After I began mixing with them, and as I became more acquainted with them, I discovered that all of them regarded themselves as Muslim. The majority, if not all, did pray after a fashion. There were some that I taught to pray, and some prayed from time to time. Despite the fact that all of them regarded themselves as Muslim, I found it necessary to clarify with each of them what being Islamic actually meant. They saw themselves as Muslims and Ba'athist at the same time and were convinced that there was no contradiction between the two. What really enabled me to pave the way to uprooting their allegiance to Ba'athism was my explanation of what religion really was, what the true meaning of Islam was, what worship involved and, particularly, the worship of Allah. When I explained these terms to them some underwent a complete about face and thanked me for my help in clarifying issues for them. For example, one day when we were sitting together I was asked to choose a topic and talk to them about it as they felt that my explanations gave them a different perspective and made them happier.

That, in effect, was the beginning of my instruction of them. If we sat together for half an hour, 20 minutes was giv-

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en over to me. If we had more time, then I spoke for longer, sometimes up to an hour.

Much of that time was spent explaining terminology and I told them that they needed to better understand the meanings of terms if they were ever going to improve their understanding of the deeper concepts embedded within Islam and articulated in the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and which would lead them to an understanding of Islamic piety. They were happy for me to instruct them.

In order to make them understand the term religion properly I had, first of all, to show them that the Ba'athist path they were in prevented them from being true Muslims as they were not following the Prophet (peace be upon him). They found it hard to understand why if they regarded themselves Ba'athists they could not call themselves Muslim. If one regards himself as a secularist, as non-religious, by definition that person is not bound by any religion, so obviously cannot claim that he is religious. This matter of the relationship between adherence to Ba'athism and Islam was fundamental in my explanation of why an individual could not be both a Ba'athist and a Muslim. In dealing with the issues of reward and punishment, Allah refers in the Quran to the: "Sovereign of the Day of Recompense"(Alfatiha:4), and in illuminating the meaning of submission Allah says: "Unquestionably, for Allah is the pure religion"(Az-Zumer:3). Elsewhere he says: "So worship God, make religion pure for Him alone"(Az-Zumer:3). Religion, in this context, means submission. Another meaning for the term religion is that it is a program or way of life. As almighty God says: "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion"(Al-Kafirun:5)

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which means, in a sense, each to his own. The full quote is about believers and non-believers: "Say, O disbelievers, I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship. For you is your religion, and for me is my religion"(Al-Kafirun:1-5). Therefore, those who do not follow Islam have their own religion, (For you are your religion). So, the question is what is the religion of non-believers? It is often thought that religion means only heavenly religion but this is not the case. Non-believers include people of the book, Jews, Christians, and followers of Magus. Some non-believers, or infidels, are atheists and follow no organized religion as such(1). In addition, there are polytheists, idol worshippers, hypocrites and apostates who were once Muslims. The phrase "Say, O disbelievers!" includes all types of non-Islamic belief and almighty Allah lumps their beliefs together under the one word 'disbelief' and says: "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion". To recap, every non-believer has a religion in the sense that religion means the way of life followed. As Allah says in the Quran: "It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion, although they who associate others with Allah dislike it"(Attawba:33).

Islam is the true religion and must prevail over all others. The word religion is denoted by the letters alif, A, and lam, L, which characterize the type of religion. All ways of living, all programs which guide peoples' lives in communities are, thus, religions. This includes secularism, democracy, communism, Judaism, Christianity and Magianism.

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(1) Religion here means the heavenly religions.

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The fourth meaning of religion in the Quran is the way or system of life. Almighty Allah says: "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam"(Al-Imran:19). Here religion and Islam are synonymous. In another verse He says: "I have chosen Islam for you as religion". Allah made Islam for us as a religion, as a system or way of life or a program.

I made it clear for the Ba'athist leaders that religion essentially means a way of life. I told them that Ba'athism, secularism, democracy, capitalism, and globalization are all religions. Any program or way or system designed to bring people together and order their daily lives is, according to Allah, a religion but they are false religions, and Allah says: "it is He Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth"(Shakir). Allah is the one who has sent His messenger with guidance, with the religion of truth. There are false religions which Allah enjoins us to oppose so that Islam will become "dominant over all religion". He has sent His messenger with guidance and the true religion to individuals, and to societies, so that this goal of making Islam the one true way over all others can be achieved.

After I explained the word religion, they asked whether, when they were Ba'athists, were they followers of another religion and I said that that was indeed the case. I asked whether, if they had asked Saddam, if the program which they called the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was similar to Islam, with similar values to those expressed in the Quran and Sunna or whether it was something else entirely, what would he have said? They replied that he would have said it was something else because he saw Islam as more to do with history and heritage. I asked another question; if they had removed the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party and replaced it with Quran and Sunna,

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would he have agreed to that? Their view that Islam was Islam but for the Day of Judgment and for worship only. I told them that this was their fundamental mistake and Islam was not like that at all, and their view of Islam was distorted! I made the point that they had made the mistake of comparing Islam with Christianity in Europe. The Christianity of Jesus (peace be upon him) had been changed, warped, and turned into a religion of the individual, filled with superstition and myth. They had erroneously compared that creed the true religion of Allah, Islam, which provides not only guidance for individuals but also sets out a way of life for the whole of society. As God put it, bringing with guidance and true religion. After I had made the term religion clear for them, I then explained what worship meant, saying: "it is You we worship and You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path"(Alfatiha:5-6). I asked them what was meant when we said that in praying we talked to almighty Allah, and what was the meaning of the concept of worshipping him alone, of seeking help to stay on a righteous path? Their concept was that worship meant prayer, fasting, remembering everyone and giving charity. I told them that that was just a small part of worship. I explained that the original meaning of the Arabic word ibadat, the word we use for worship, tariqun muabbad, literally a paved road, or alternatively, baeerun mubbad, a phrase used when a camel has been brought under control when given tar. When it is under control, it is said to be muabbad, which means that is calm and has become quiet. Abada and ubudiyya are words meaning submission and surrender to Allah's will. The fact that prayer involves a supplicant prostrating himself symbolizes submission and bending to Allah's will. Fasting is also a form of submission to Allah and is about implementing Allah's rule and observing Halal

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that is lawful, and avoiding Haram which is unlawful. Similarly, obeying Allah's commands and rejecting what is forbidden in the social and political fields, in relationships with other people, and their treatment, whether on an individual or family level, or on the level of political parties and international engagement, are all part of that concept of submission to Allah. Almighty Allah, just as He speaks about worship and personal matters, also speaks about political, economic, social and other issues. The point is, you have to be obedient to Allah in all aspects of life, and only then can say you have fulfilled your duty and are correct when you say that you only worship Allah. Those who pray in the mosque to Allah but follow another program or path in the political, social, and economic aspects of his life is not, in fact, worshipping Allah alone and is therefore not following the injunction to worship only Allah. Those who chant the slogan that they worship Allah alone are not true followers unless they follow in all aspects of their lives.

I made all of these terms and points as clear as I could for the Ba'athist prisoners and I believe my clarifications were a turning point for a number of them. Some told me that no one up until then had explained the relationship between their personal lives and their political and social lives. They felt that their Mullahs had not made it clear that Ba'athism, and other political ideologies, were, in effect, other religions competing with the one true religion, Islam. Following my explanations, many understood that religion is about a way of life, and is a program for all aspects of life, not just selected parts.

Some of them said to me that they were about to enter negotiations with the Americans and if all went well they would not forget me, even if I had been in opposition to them in the

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past, as they felt some obligation due to my discussions with them. I laughed and told them that I did not think they were in that good a position vis a vis the Americans and that their, no doubt well meaning, offer to link themselves to me might not necessarily be to my advantage!

They were, I think, a little hurt and asked me why I had that viewpoint and I replied that being Ba'athists had brought them to where they then were and if they were not able to do anything for themselves, it was unlikely that they could do anything for me. I illustrated my point with a story. I recounted how I had read in a magazine a tale of the time when Jews and Arabs fought against each other in the 1967 Six Day War. Arabs fought in the name of nationalism, Uruba or Arabism. If the war had been fought in the name of Islam, all Muslims would have participated and would have been victorious. In 1967, when the Arabs were defeated in the war, the armies of the Arab states were defeated and their bases and positions fell under the control of Israeli army. One of the armies defeated was the Ba'athist army. In one of the bases captured, I did not know if it had belonged to the Iraqi Ba'athists or the Syrian Ba'athists, there was a sign saying, "Do not ask me about my faith. I am a socialist, an Arab and a Ba'athist". I repeated what I had read in the magazine and I said that if this story was true then here was the proof that the Ba'athists put their politics before their faith. The report went on to say that the Israelis had crossed out the line about not asking about faith and replaced it with one of their own: "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah. And Allah with the patient"(Al-Baqarah:249). The Jews wanted to tell Arabs that this verse applied to them. Despite the perverted nature of

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their religion, they were at least being true to it, while so many who regarded themselves as Muslims did not hold true to their religion.

I told them they needed to learn a lesson from this. Three hundred million Arabs humiliated by a few million Jews. I asked them what people would learn from them, what people would see when they looked at them?!

We had discussions of that sort from time to time and, as I have said, these could, of course, be heated with raised voices and strong feelings expressed. I tried always to remain calm and balanced despite their excitement. In the end, they respected me and told me that they had really tried hard to get me to agree with them but I never did. Even if they felt that I had destroyed their arguments, it was something they would never have accepted from anyone else. It was gratifying to hear them say that they thought I was sincere and that I told them what I did, not out of hatred, but out of a desire to guide them. I did try to let them understand that I did not approve of their deeds, and I did not need or want anything from them, but they were fellow human beings for whom I had great pity. I wanted them to look into themselves and review what they had done in their lives to bring them to where they now were. I prayed that they would see their errors and choose a new path for themselves as I genuinely believed that if they continued down the road they were currently travelling, they faced only the direst of consequences.

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Q: Mamosta, before we go further into the debates, particularly with Ba'athist leaders like Ali Hassan Al-Majid, a question has come to my mind that I would like you to address. The Ba'athists were involved in all sorts of activities, including suppression of their own people, aggression, including war, against other countries such as Kuwait and Iran, yet they used Islamic terms in many aspects of their activities. For example, they named most of their military divisions and covert teams after the Prophets companions. They named missiles Nassan and Hussein. Did you ask them why they did that? Do you think they did this in ignorance ? A supplementary question is, if it was their ignorance that led them to this practice, do you think that excuses them and their crimes against Islam?

Ali Bapir: Briefly, what I can say is that from my perspective, none of the Ba'athist leaders understood Islam properly. They later admitted as much when, after many debates and discussions, they acknowledged my guidance and that I had taught them many things with which they had been previously unfamiliar. A group went so far as to say that they wished that when Saddam, whom they called the President, was in power that he had had the opportunity to hear what I had told them. They were convinced that if he had had that chance he would have been convinced by my arguments in relation to Islam and that would have been a truly historic turning point in the history of Iraq.

I countered that I was not so sure that my fate would not have been the same as that as other scholars who had been imprisoned, deported or hanged. Their opinion was that that would not have happened because Saddam admired bravery and would have respected me and listened to what I had to

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say. For me, then, these Ba'athists did not really understand Islam and, on the contrary, their beliefs were diametrically opposed to true religion. They were no better in that regard than secularists and, while they might regard themselves as Muslim, the fact was that they could not read a verse from the Quran properly, had not memorized any of the Prophet's sayings and, in general, they were unfamiliar with the God given Islam that they criticized. They had, at best, a limited understanding of some aspects of Islam and, at worst, a totally distorted view of what Islam was about. Their understanding, such as it was, had been shaped by Christian views of Islam or the views of orientalists who had no love of our religion. Their stance was very similar to that of our own home grown secularists, who were also ignorant about Islam. That insularity in thinking, to me, is in marked contrast to Islamist thinkers who do study and seek to understand other belief systems, religions, and political ideologies. For me, secularists are guilty of the closed mindedness of which they often accuse Islamists of. I never saw the degree of dogmatic close-mindedness amongst Islamists that I witnessed amongst secularists and other non-Islamic groups. My opinion is that Islamists often tend to have more knowledge about their opponents' beliefs than the opponents do themselves, while those same opponents rarely, if ever, have any knowledge of Islam. By that I mean that not only do they have no insight into Islam, they do not even have the most basic knowledge such as a verse from the Quran or a saying from the Prophet (peace be upon him).

The Ba'athists were in that category and I berated them with carrying out their vile actions in the name of Islam. As far as I was concerned, they had destroyed a nation in the name of Anfal, a Muslim nation, but I told them that I was

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one of those Muslims that they claimed to be representing and that they did not speak for me or many like me. They admitted that I had taught them a great deal and I, in my turn, had learned from those scholars who had educated this nation. I was one of the students of our religious schools. The Ba'athists associated their actions with those of the Prophet's companions, those pious leaders spread the light of Allah and provided guidance to the people whereas, in fact, they simply propagated Ba'athism which had absolutely nothing in common with the teachings of those revered leaders. To begin with, they defended their standpoints vigorously but by the end many of them admitted their errors and accepted that in using the names of those companions in the way they had, and in using Islamic slogans, they had not been honest. They came to accept that those who linked Ba'athist policies and actions with Islam were in the wrong and, indeed, were guilty of bringing Islam into disrepute. They began to see that their beliefs were just another type of secularism of which they were victims. In an interview with the weekly newspaper, 'Media', I mentioned that I found it strange that the Kurdish leadership defended secularism and supported the idea that the Constitution must be secular. In that interview I asked the question about what exactly had been the benefits and blessings of the secular regimes of the Ba'aths, the Kamalists, the Iranian Shah or the Syrian Ba'athists. Our people were the victims of secular regimes and we gained precisely nothing from them except disasters, destruction and misery.

When I talked about the whole 'Anfal' process, which was a disaster, there were those among them who were admitted that they did not know that it was a word from the Quran or that the whole process had proved disastrous. I rebuked them for associating a holy concept with the massa-

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cre of over 100,000 people. They said that the numbers were exaggerated but I replied that even if it had been only one who had been killed unlawfully it was one too many because Allah says in the Quran: "…whosoever kills a soul unless for a soul or corruption [done] in the land (on earth) - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely. And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear proof. Then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land were transgressors"(Al-Maidah:32). This claim that the numbers were exaggerated was something they repeated often. In particular, they disputed the figure of 5,000 killed by chemical weapons in Halabja and would not accept some estimates of over 180,000 people having been killed in the 'Anfal Process'. I simply re-iterated my contention that even one single soul was too many. My point to them that whatever the true numbers and facts were, they were used as a way of defaming Islam, its values and some major Islamic personalities in the eyes of those who were not well acquainted with Islam. Those who had any knowledge of Islam knew that many of these so called "facts" were fabrications and had been falsely linked to Islamists to discredit Islam.

Q: Mamosta, did they explain why they had used the names they had and so linked Islam with their campaigns and crimes?

Ali Bapir: They said because they regarded themselves and their army as Muslim, and by linking those great Muslims to their cause, they believed they sent a message to their troops that they were on the right path, on the same path as those who had fought against the Romans and the Persians. This, of course, raised the morale of those soldiers.

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I said that when Islamic Forces fought against the Byzantines and Persians, they did so under the banner ,"La ilaha illa Allah Muhammad rasullullah", that is, "there is no God except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah". They, on the other hand, I argued, had fought under the banner of "Unity, Freedom, Socialism", which was a mixture of chauvinistic nationalism, socialism, and eastern and western concepts which had nothing at all to do with the idea that 'there is no God except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah'. The Islamic army, whether fighting against Byzantines or Persians, fought against their repression and for justice and the reformation of society, while they as Ba'athists had fought against people, not only that, but against their own people.

Q: Mamosta, let us return to your discussions with Ali Hassan Majid. He is, in our eyes, the prime suspect in the chemical attacks and in the planning of the Anfal process. To what extent did you discuss these matters with him? Did he provide any justification or perspective on those issues?

Ali Bapir: I had been in prison about 2 months when they bought Ali Hassan Al-Majid. When he found out that I was there he came and sought me out to tell me that he brought good news. He told me about the demonstrations that had been held in support of my release and confirmed that he had seen the event on Al-Jazeera and other channels. I questioned as to whether the demonstration was really about my imprisonment and he described the chanting and slogans to re-assure me. Later, a relative, a cousin I believe, confirmed what he had said. This cousin was named Barzan, though he was not the Barzan who was Saddam's brother.

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Ali Hassan Al-Majid was initially housed well away from me but after about 2 months he was transferred to our division. There were 2 rooms between my cell and his. He was taken for exercise on his own, whereas the other 6 of us were allowed to exercise together. He asked me from time to time if he could move his chair so that he was opposite my window so that we could chat. I was more than happy to do that. On one occasion, I do not know whether it was day or night, instead of using his exercise time outside he used it up talking to me. I asked him various questions and usually addressed him by his nickname, Abu Hassan. He was forthright in expressing his opinions, which included his belief that people had a right to form political parties. He also advocated a free environment so that people could exercise their political rights. On the other hand, he believed that there should be only one party, otherwise, he said, the consequences would be as we were then experiencing in Iraq. When I asked that if these were his beliefs, why he had not communicated them to Saddam, he claimed that he had tried to advise Saddam not to pursue some of the policies but he had not listened. I wanted to know why he had been unsuccessful in changing Saddam's viewpoint and he answered that others, such as Tariq Aziz, Taha Yassin Ramadan, and Izzet Ad-Douri were always around him and had much greater influence on him. During those talks I raised the fact that he was known as Chemical Ali. He knew that he was called that and said that if I told people I had been physically near to him they would believe that I had been exposed to poisonous gases. He ridiculed the idea and asked me if I had any chemical spots on my clothes. He saw the nickname as a way of defaming him. I pursued the issue, despite what he said, and asked him about his involvement in the Anfal campaign

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and asked him if his conscience troubled him about anything in relation to his part in it. I expressed my shock that those affected were fellow Muslims, his own people, and amongst the poorest and most vulnerable in our society, who were simply asking for their rights to be acknowledged, to be free of exploitation, and for the integrity of their territory and honour to be respected. I told him bluntly that he obviously did not realise that Allah would take revenge. He talked about these matters at length and swore the strongest oaths possible that he had not been responsible for any chemical attacks at all. He claimed that he had been a party official but the one who was directly responsible for the execution of the attacks, the prime suspect, was Nizar Khazraji, who was the army corps leader in Suleimani. This body of troops was entirely under his command and it was he who ordered the use of chemical weapons. He went further and said he was not entirely convinced that Saddam himself knew of the attacks as he had become extremely angry when told about them. Saddam contemplated punishing Khazraji and demanded an explanation from him of his actions. Khazraji argued that if he had not carried out the attack, the Iranians would have advanced and, to his mind, this was more than enough justification for what he did. Saddam, according to Ali Hassan, remonstrated with him and told him that there was no justification for what he had done to our own people.

What surprised me even more was the claim by some of these Ba'athist leaders that it was actually Iran that had carried out chemical attacks. They even brought me an American newspaper which repeated that claim. I was more than a little confused and pointed out that Ali Hassan Al-Majid had admitted to me that the Ba'athists had used chemical warfare, although he blamed Khazraji for authorizing it. I asked them

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how, on the one hand, they could claim that Saddam became angry with the man who had given permission for the attack and then, on the other, claim that it was the Iranians who did it? I was more than a little surprised! I put it to them that they should at least get their stories straight, and that if Iran had carried out these attacks, I wondered why the Iranian news media had covered the attack in such detail, bringing the attention of the whole world to the atrocity. The Iranians told the world about the disaster that was inflicted on the Kurdish people and caused the death of several thousand Halabja residents. There is simply no way that they would have done that if they had been the perpetrators of the crime.

I asked Ali Hassan specifically about the Anfal campaign but he insisted that he had been unaware of it and took no part in it. I found that hard to believe and told him so. I reminded him that he was supposedly the second most powerful man in the regime, after Saddam, so it seemed highly unlikely that he could claim to have no knowledge of the campaign. Moreover, other senior figures from the regime openly said that he was lying when he claimed to have tried to persuade Saddam against some of his more aggressive policies and that he had refused to listen. They claimed that his influence was so great that Saddam always took his advice and that, after Saddam, he had been the most important figure in determining the regime's policies. I asked him outright why so many people believed he was responsible for so much of what had happened if that was not the case. He replied that people did not know the truth and assumed that as he was Saddam's cousin he could do as he pleased. He assured me that it was not like that and he continued to deny any knowledge or involvement in the chemical attacks or in the Anfal campaign. He was at great pains to convince me of his inno-

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cence. I told him that even if he managed to convince me, it would matter little as he had to convince the wider world and suggested that when he was put on trial by the Americans he should take the opportunity to prove his innocence. He responded by saying that he just wanted me to know the true facts and he would defend himself when the time came.

Q: Over what period of time did you have discussions with Ali Hassan Al-Majid?

Ali Bapir: A few months at most, possibly 3 months.

Q: Was he still with you when he was tried for the first time?

Ali Bapir: No, they always separated those who were about to be tried. They separated 11 people in all; Ali Hassan Al-Majid, Tariq Aziz, Taha Yassin Ramadan, Barzan, and Watban with his brother-in-law, and the brother of Saddam's brother-in-law, his name was Kamal, and Abd Hmud, and the Defense Minister. They separated all of them from us.

Q: You mentioned that Ali Hassan Al-Majid defended a multiparty system, and had his own ideas and political views. However, it is often said that the leadership of the Ba'athists, especially those closest to Saddam, comprised people who had a very low level of formal education. For example, Ali Hassan Al-Majid was a taxi driver but still became a high ranking official in the Party. Did the other leaders of the Ba'ath Party with whom you lived in prison have any formal education or qualifications? What is your estimate of their level of political awareness and, in particular, do you think that they had the political acumen to develop their own political philosophy? You commented before that you found their level of awareness and understanding of Islam to be woefully

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inadequate. Could the same be said about their knowledge of political theory or was there any indication that they had experience in politics that might make up for any theoretical deficits?

Ali Bapir: I told them bluntly to their faces that I did not understand how they had ever run a state and was surprised that they had reached the positions they had. They expressed surprise at my assessment of their abilities. They suggested that my view of them was being distorted by prison conditions, which had demoralised them and made many of them ill. Some of them were undoubtedly highly educated and others clearly did have a variety of political experience. However, as far as I could determine, the real reason for their promotions to the most senior positions in the regime was that they were the ones trusted by Saddam and who had been with him since the initial coup d'etat that had brought the Ba'athists to power. There were those amongst them that could not write a letter in Arabic without making numerous mistakes. Many at that level were not able to speak eloquent, proper, Arabic. Sometimes, when they were talking to me or telling jokes, I would ask those who were better educated to translate what their colleagues were saying to me. That was how poor their command of Arabic was. They mangled the Arabic language so badly that they could not be understood by those who were not of their group. In general, I regarded all of them as incompetent but I concede that some of them were educated, experts even, but those who were educated complained a great deal. They constantly would tell anyone who would listen that their voices were never heard. One of them, Samir Omar An-Najm, was the head of a delegation who met with Mullah Mustafa Barzani. Later, I told Kak Masud about that meeting and he confirmed that it had taken place. He saw

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him as an educated man and had led the first delegation to meet with his father. Despite his education, he was, he claimed, never listened to. Most of those with me in prison agreed that the real power and influence over Saddam lay in the hands of his sons and that the family was the real power in the regime. Many of them admitted that reality but others were hypocritical. When alone with me they would criticise Saddam and his family but when in a group they kept their opinions to themselves.

Q: Mamosta, what was Samir Omar An-Najm's last post in the Ba'athist regime before his arrest?

Ali Bapir: He was a member of the Regional Command Council but I do not know what other posts he held. He was an elderly man, over sixty, I would guess.

Q: Mamosta, with which other Ba'athist leaders did you discuss Ba'ath's history and related topics?

Ali Bapir: I do not see any good reason to disclose names but another subject which I talked about and which generated heated debate was the 'Kurdish cause'. The Ba'athists referred to Kurdistan as 'Northern Iraq' and I told them that I found that term offensive and if they wanted to show me respect, then they should refer to Kurdistan instead. They asked me why I felt so strongly about the use of the term Northern Iraq and I told them that as far as I was concerned it was an illegitimate term and that Almighty God had created a nation called the Kurds, in a place called Kurdistan. For me, Kurdistan exists in the same way that Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkistan and Arabistan exist. I accepted that Kurdistan was linked to Iraq and was in the north of the political entity known as Iraq but, for me, Kurdistan is the correct term for

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the homeland of the Kurdish people. They broadened their argument and said that when they referred to Northern Iraq they included Mosul, which they said was not part of Kurdistan and, therefore, they should be forgiven for using the term as they did. I did not accept that explanation and told them that what was at the root of the matter was that they did not even want to utter the word Kurdistan, even in the context of a prison.

With regard to the Kurdish cause and the legitimate Islamic solution to the problems associated with it, we had a number of very heated debates. They expressed the view that they had nothing against me except what they felt was my fervent Kurdish nationalism. I tried to disabuse them of that notion. I explained that I did, indeed, have a strong love for my people and my country but I had absolutely no hatred of other nations or peoples. I admire and like and Arabs and non-Arabs alike, if they are true.

To summarise my answer to your question, I would say that the general intellectual and political competence shown by these Ba'athist leaders was low, although a few were well educated. Those who were educated, however, consistently complained that they were never listened to by Saddam and that only the members of his immediate family had any real influence in shaping his policies. Those who suggested alternative policies were ignored. The more competent of the leadership group imprisoned with me believed that if Saddam had listened to advice other than that of his sons none of us would have found ourselves in the position we did at that point.

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Q: Mamosta, you mentioned Samir Omar An-Najm, who was the head of the team who negotiated with the Kurdish Revolutionary Command at that time. Did you ask him about the Aylul Revolution, and how it ended, or about Barzani's personality and attempted assassination?

Ali Bapir: Yes, I did ask him about those matters. He told me that he had been in charge of the first delegation sent to negotiate with Mullah Mustafa Barzani (mercy be on him) and the Kurdish Revolutionary Command. He also spoke about Kak Idris and Kak Masud, who he said were with their father but did not hold any official positions.

Samir An-Najm said that in his discussions with Mullah Mustafa he had asked him what it was that he wanted from him as the representative of the Iraqi government. Mulah Mustafa outlined his demands and conditions but Samir An-Najm would not disclose them to me. He said that the conditions asked for could not be met in the short time frame involved and he had made that clear to various Kurdish leaders, including Doctor Mahmud Othman. He claimed that he had let it be known that if Mullah Mustafa wanted to talk to him as the representative of the Iraqi government, he had to be prepared to do so without conditions as his demand that specific individuals were surrendered to him as a pre-condition of negotiations was not acceptable. Samir An-Najm says that he was willing to talk but if those conditions were insisted upon he would return to Baghdad. In the end, discussions did take place without preconditions. At those discussions, apparently, Barzani brought out a map of Kurdistan. Samir An-Najm says that when Barzani did this, he told one of his colleagues in the negotiations that Barzani was obviously very serious about the negotiations since the

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map was an indication that he wanted to talk about issues relating to Kurdistan's border.

I asked him what he thought of Mullah Mustafa as a personality and his reply indicated that he had great respect for him. He characterized the Mullah as a man of principle and integrity, though a stubborn politician who was not willing to compromise his views. Samir An-Najm concluded that the Mullah was not someone who took much notice of his colleagues in his party, or indeed had any respect for them, and that he was the decision maker. I am paraphrasing his reply to my enquiry but that was the gist of his assessment of the Mullah.

I asked others if they had any information on the assassination attempts made on Barzani. They told me that a Mullah who was known to Barzani was sent to meet him. He was, it is said, unaware that TNT had been hidden in his clothes. Some of this man's colleagues were aware of the plan and had their own means of escape worked out. These colleagues had the control of the explosives hidden in the Mullah's clothes and the intention was to wait until he was in proximity to Barzani, ideally in deep conversation, and then they would detonate the explosives. They were adamant that the Mullah did not know that the clothes he was wearing had explosives hidden in them and that he was oblivious to the assassination plan. He was blown up never knowing the plan but his colleagues all knew of it.

Q: Did they offer any opinion as to who was responsible for the failure of the Aylul Revolution?

Ali Bapir: They accused the Kurdish party, and said that it had become clear to them, through documentary evidence, that the Aylul Revolutionary Command was dealing not only

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with Shah of Iran, that was public knowledge, but also with Israel and the CIA. They claimed that Israeli Mossad, the CIA, and the Iranian Intelligence Agency, Savak, were intimately involved in the Revolutionary Command's plans and, consequently, they felt in great danger and forced to compromise with the Shah over control of parts of the Persian coast in order to end this problem. Under the auspices of the Algerian President, an accord was signed. In their account, they contended that if the Kurdish leaders had not dealt with the CIA and Israel, which they were very sensitive about, they would not have found themselves in the position of having to compromise over part of Iraqi and Arab territory, and not needed to suppress the Kurdish revolution.

Q: Did these excuses ever convince you?

Ali Bapir: Doctor Mahmud Othman, himself, wrote a piece in which he admitted that he had had a relationship with Israel and that the relationship with the U.S. had never been hidden. I repeated the old Kurdish proverb which says: "A drowning man will clutch at any straw". I told them that the Kurdish people were oppressed and no one came to our aid. In those circumstances, the Kurds were forced into actions that they would have preferred to avoid. I told them that while I might not have agreed with everything the Kurdish leadership did, nonetheless, given the overall situation, the Kurdish leadership found itself forced to do whatever it could to oppose Ba'athist aggression. Sadly, those that the Kurds looked to for aid lied and betrayed them. The Shah was only interested in achieving his own goals. He acted as an agent of the U.S. and Israel in supporting the Aylul Revolution and both of those two countries only gave support so long as it coincided with their own interests.

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So, from my perspective, what led to the failure of the Kurdish revolution were the policy decisions of the U.S. and Israel. The Kurdish leadership believed that it had no alternative but to turn to the U.S. and Israel for support. However, as an Islamist, I found it hard to accept the need of that support because I did not believe that anything could be gained from working with non-believers and a colonial power. I just did not see what they had to offer a dispossessed people such as us. As soon as it seemed that they might achieve their own goals by negotiating with Baghdad, they turned their backs on us in the same way as was now happening. I believe that the Kurdish leadership was woefully misguided in thinking that the U.S. came to Iraq for the sake of Kurds, or for the sake of Sunnis or Shi'ites, or anyone else for that matter. The U.S. came to topple the regime in Iraq and to establish a presence in this specific region and to enhance its presence generally in this vital part of the world. Once they had decided that their interests required that Kurds must live in a federal state, it simply insisted that that was the way it must be. History shows that it supported, and then did not support, the Aylul Revolution purely based on its perceptions of its own interests. When it suited, it instructed the Shah of Iran to cooperate with the revolution and when its interests no longer coincided with those of the Kurds, the Americans told the Shah to pull the plug on that support.

I told my Ba'athist fellow prisoners that the Kurdish leaders felt that they were justified in seeking support from these outside sources but that as an ardent Islamist I could never have gone down that path. If I had, by circumstances, found I had no other option, I could never have characterized such action as legitimate. In accepting that help, I believe that the entire nation was potentially put in danger and if the choice

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was between an apparently successful but tainted revolution and no revolution but the maintenance of our integrity, I would have chosen the latter option, on the basis that any "successful" revolution would have involved a cost that was too great to pay and, in the long run, would fail anyway.

To repeat what I said earlier, Samir Omar An-Najm, in talking about Mullah Mustafa, showed great respect and described him as a man of principle who was a sincere advocate of his cause that they all respected. I was surprised that despite the nature of the propaganda against him put out by his opponents, Samir, an avowed Ba'athist, could still honour Mullah Mustafa as a principled person despite disagreeing with his policies, and the nature of his relationships.

Q: Mamosta, for us the Kurdish question was the central issue in all of these situations. Did you debate the Kurdish question, including the status of Kirkuk, with them?

Ali Bapir: In general, they did not believe in the right of Kurdistan to exist as a separate nation. In all of my discussions it was very rare for any of them, even the fairest, to express any support for that notion. Nor was there any support for Muammar al_Qaddafi's declaration that Kurds were a nation in the same way as other nations, created by God and should have their own state.

One who did offer support was Sattam Alqaud. He told me a little about himself and explained that he had been affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood earlier in his life. He added that the Ba'athist regime persecuted him to such an extent that he had been forced to pursue his education in the U.S. He was a complete gentleman and, in my view, highly competent. He said that on his release he would openly say that Kurds were

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entitled to a federated state, with their independence guaranteed as that of a nation just like any other. Despite his earlier persecution, and although he was not a Ba'athist, he did seem to have had a relationship of some kind with the senior figures in the regime before his arrest.

There were a few others who held similar views, especially after I pointed out what Islam had to say on the subject. I reminded them that Almighty Allah says: "… and [we] made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another"(Al-Hujurat:13). So, I made it clear to my Arab brothers that just as they were a nation, so also were the Turks, the Persians, the Afghans, and the Kurds. And just as they regarded their nationhood as legitimate and important for them, and just as they felt entitled to their own land, state and nationalist identity, so too did I as a Kurd. I wanted those same national attributes, those same privileges. I argued that God made all of us to be part of a nation and does not prefer one over another. Allah says: "The best among you are the pious ones", which I take to mean that those who bind themselves to, and keep, Allah's laws are more likely to be good people. After I had made all these points clear, some, in the light of what I had said, agreed that Kurds had a right to self-determination in their own land. I was gratified that I was able to persuade some of them that Kurds had been wronged and oppressed, and that I could give them information that they had not previously known. One, an ex-minister, admitted to me that he had been to Kurdistan and saw many villages orchards, gardens and mosques all destroyed. He said that he wept when he saw what had been done and in each mosque he found in one of those destroyed villages he prayed and cried. Quite a few of them denied any knowledge of the atrocities that I described to them.

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Q: What did they say about Kirkuk?

Ali Bapir: Most of them firmly believed that Kirkuk lay in what they considered to be Arab land, Arabistan. The name itself means inhabited by Arabs. I had to inform them that the area had been populated by Kurds in 1957, with minorities of Turkmens and Arabs. They were not aware that after 1957 there was a deliberate and systematic programme of Arab settlement in parallel with a removal of Kurds. Those who were aware of what had happened said that it made no difference to the situation as it now was as there was a clear Arab majority in the region.

Q: They did not accept that Kirkuk was part of Kurdistan?

Ali Bapir: A few thought that if any specific place could be proved to be part of Kurdistan it should be returned but the majority did not hold that view.

Q: In regard to Ali Hassan Al-Majid, did you or he initiate these discussions?

Ali Bapir: He made the first approach at the time. He sought me out to tell me of the demonstrations in support of my release. I took the opportunity to invite him to sit down outside his cell door and raise some matters with him.

Q: Did he know you?

Ali Bapir: Yes, he did and he told me that the Americans had asked him if I knew you. He told me that he had said to them that he had not met me personally but knew me as a member of the Iraqi opposition and was an opponent of the regime. They also asked him if he thought that I had any links with Al-Qaida and Osama Bin Laden, or to you, to which he replied he did not know in the case of the first two,

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and no in my case. He said he laughed at the suggestion that he had links with me and told them that he regarded me as one of the enemy. His view was that I constantly wrote and worked against the regime, did not even regard Ba'athists as Muslim, and that I was someone they wanted to kill and who wanted to kill them.

Q: Putting aside the issue of the crimes attributed to him, which he denied, how did he seem to you, in general terms?

Ali Bapir: He was a courteous person, friendly and open but, in terms of his moral fiber, I would assess him as weak and lacking in resilience. He certainly could talk and was a gifted public speaker but in the context of prison that ability counted for very little. I came to see that many people changed their opinions and positions while in prison. Prison can have that effect on people and so I made allowances for my fellow prisoners and tried not to judge without information. I was interested in what people had been like before they were arrested and when enquiring about Ali Hassan Al-Majid, when he was in power, there were those who said that he had acted like a pharaoh, almost a law unto himself. They suggested that Ali Hassan Al-Majid was putting on an act when he depicted himself as a poor man with no influence as their perspective was that he answered to no one when in power.

Not surprisingly then, I was very cautious about taking him at face value but, in general, he was an open person and was invariably courteous when talking to others and to me and I admit that I did have a certain respect for him. I based my response to him on the instruction: "And when you are greeted with greeting, greet [in return] with one better than it or [at least] return it [in a life manner]"(An-Nisa:86). I told

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many of the Ba'athists that given what they had done to my people, not many would blame me if I refused to say salaam to them but for the sake of Allah and of Islam I chose to act differently. I had pity for them because of the calamitous situation in which they found themselves and I believed that as a Muslim I had no alternative other than to regard them with mercy and that such an attitude was in keeping with Islamic values. I also told them, however, that that did not mean that I had forgotten what they had done. My analysis of each individual involved looking at what each had done while in power. What people were like while powerless in prison was one thing but what they were like when they had the power and the opportunity to take important decisions was another thing entirely. As the saying goes, you cannot swim on the land, you have to have water, and so in the case of these men, how they behaved under the guard and daily scrutiny of American guards, in a situation of total powerlessness, where even going to the toilet was done under supervision, did not necessarily reveal their true selves. How they acted when in power told me a great deal more about them as individuals. So I was very circumspect in coming to conclusions about the Ba'athist leaders based only on how they behaved in prison.

Q: Do you believe that the views and judgments of scholars subjected to the conditions you have described can be trusted?

Ali Bapir: The conclusions of scholars who were broken and demoralized by their treatment cannot be accepted at face value. However, where a scholar has demonstrated resilience and maintained his moral integrity, according to sharia, then his conclusions can be welcomed and accepted.

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Q: Did you see you see and talk to Ali Hassan every day during those few months or did you see him only occasionally?

Ali Bapir: I saw him every day during exercise time. That does not mean that I wanted to talk to him every day because there were others who sought my company and advice. I also liked to spend time by myself writing and reading, the Quran. When I did go outside, I usually found them playing dominoes, Dama, chess, backgammon, cards and so on, but I never joined in. I preferred reading, reciting the Quran or exercising.

At those times I was often asked if I could spare 10 minutes to sit and talk and that applied to Ali Hassan A-Majid too. I probably sat with him on his own 3 or 4 times, and another 5 or so times when we sat together as part of our division. Other than that, I might have joined their group on a couple of occasions when they were chatting.

I sat with them for the specific purpose of instructing them, offering advice, or debating an issue. I did not have the time to sit and tell or listen to stories. They, on the other hand, often sat discussing, for example, food, imagining Dolma(1), Gippa(2), or the Head and Abdomen(3). Someone else would wish for rice with various accompanying dishes and they asked me what I wished was available in the Camp. I said I was content with anything that was softer than a stone! I did not have any problems with the food but if they wanted to imagine all sorts of dishes that they could not have that was up to them and there was no harm in it.

I did not tend to associate with them unless there was some serious political or intellectual issue to discuss, to answer their questions, or to give a lecture on a specific topic.

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(1) (2) (3) are types of food famous in Iraq.

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Q: Mamosta, with regard to the crimes perpetrated in Halabja and during the Anfal period, did Ali Hassan Al-Majid justify these actions and did you confront him about his involvement?

Ali Bapir: I certainly confronted him and said that he said many good things but I still believed him to be guilty. What he claimed in relation to these atrocities and his involvement did not marry up with what was generally said and was contradicted by members of his own senior leadership. Someone had to be lying. He tried very hard to convince me that he was telling the truth when he denied involvement. I told him that he had to prove his innocence in a context that mattered. What he said in the context of being a prisoner did not matter but I did not go so far as to call him a liar directly to his face. I did not think that was kind or helpful but I did tell him that it was of little account whether I believed him or not. He had to convince those in the outside world.

Q: Were you aware of the Ba'athist programs prior to your discussions with them? Or were your debates based on what they told you at the time?

Ali Bapir: I was in control of the situation. I told them that I had read a number of their publications and suggested that many of them probably had not. I referred to the books written by Elias Farah, Shebli al-Aithemy, Michael Aflaq's, In the path of Ba'ath , and booklets by Saddam Hussein. I had studied and made notes on them. I devoted part of my book, Nationalistic Sentiments, to an analysis of Ba'athist literature. I was able to quote from Ba'athist leaders' speeches, and argued that anyone who uttered those sentiments was, as far as I was concerned, an infidel. I talked to them from an educated, intellectual and scientific basis and relied not only

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on what they said at the time but on what I knew from my previous study of their policies.

Q: You mentioned that on occasion they became infuriated with you. Can you give us an instance of this?

Ali Bapir: Yes, of course. Their anger was often projected by what they said rather than through loud or abusive language. Indeed, they normally began by assuring me of their respect and that the proof of that, they suggested, was that they chose to sit and discuss matters with me. However, they were open in telling me that they resented some of my pronouncements, for example, that they worshipped Saddam as an idol. They told me they felt that such language belittled them. They also, obviously, were far from happy that I told them that their beliefs were very far from true Islam. I would not retract what I had said and told them that I had the proof for what I was saying and that I gave them my views in all sincerity in the hope that they would realise their errors and embark on a new path. I told them honestly that if they did not do so then I could see nothing but darkness and misery for them in the future. I urged them to think of the rest of their lives, and what was to come beyond that, and not to lose the chance to have a real future.

Even when I infuriated them, some would come to me later, individually, and apologise. At those times, they would often ask my forgiveness and acknowledged my sincerity. They would also ask me, when assessing them, to take into consideration that they had spent most of their adult lives believing in their cause and that it took time to re-adjust, it was not something that could be done overnight. They asked that I treat them a little less severely and perhaps not challenge everything they stood for and to understand if they became

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angry with me. I accepted that when they became angry, so too did I, and I could be very hard on them. I regarded myself as their Imam so I tried to maintain my equilibrium as much as possible. I was the one who led them in prayer, who called adhan, so although I was their opponent in many respects they still looked to me as their Imam, their spiritual leader. I ended up advising them on other aspects of their daily lives in addition to giving religious counsel and helped to resolve disputes between themselves.

Q: Did any of them not pray?

Ali Bapir: Of course. Tariq Aziz was Christian and as far as I could see he did not pray. I was told that Barzan, Saddam's brother, did not pray. I never saw Sabawi praying, but as he was in another division I cannot know for certain one way or the other. Of the others, as far as I know, they all prayed. Whether they had prayed before their imprisonment, I have no way of knowing but I can vouch for the fact that during the time I was giving them lectures and advice, they all prayed.

Q: If you were outside while they were in power, and had talked to them in the way you did, you would have been in great personal danger. Did you ever feel under any threat from them while in prison?

Ali Bapir: Not in prison, after all what could be worse than prison? Some of the Red Cross people asked me how I could stand to be with these enemies, let alone live beside them. I answered that I was instructing them, trying to get them to see their mistakes and that they respected me. Being fair changes people's characters. Even if I did become angry, they still came back. They referred to their previous posi-

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tions of power and the times when they were senior officials who were looked up to by others and they admitted that they found it hard to accept their current position of powerlessness. They wanted me to understand them and what had happened to them. The Red Cross visitors were very surprised by my attitude but I explained that our Prophet (peace be upon him) had sat with Abu Jahl, his great enemy, and talked to him, and Prophet Moses spoke with the Pharaoh. I said that I was not greater than Moses and the Ba'athists in prison with me were no worse than Abu Jahl and the Pharaoh, particularly now all of them had been brought low and were suffering the same humiliations and indignities as the rest of us. I genuinely pitied them and wanted to pull them out of the quagmire of confusion into which they had stumbled. I reminded the Red Cross officials that they themselves constantly talked about humanitarianism and dealing fairly with all human beings. They understood my point.

Q: Were there any among them who defended Ba'athist ideas or Ba'athist crimes?

Ali Bapir: Yes, there were.

Q: Who were they?

Ali Bapir: I do not feel it appropriate to name anyone specifically but there were those among them who did defend everything the Ba'ath did or stood for. During our discussions some suggested that they were paying the price for the rocket attacks on Israel, and generally opposing both Israel and the U.S. They believed that those regimes were worse than them, one party dictatorships, and it was really their opposition to them that had led them to where they now were. Some conceded that mistakes had been made and that they

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had been guilty of oppression but did not believe that those errors justified the treatment that they had been subjected to. I agreed that they had antagonized U.S. and Israel but I also said that before that they had antagonized their own people, and had spared no one, Kurds, Shi'ites, Sunnis, or our neighbours, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. I told them bluntly they spared no one.

Q: Aside from his participation in the Iran-Iraq War, Ali Hassan Al Majid had played a significant role in the war against Kuwait. Did you talk to him about that?

Ali Bapir: Yes, he claimed that he had tried to prevent abuses and that he had hung some because they had abused women or been involved in looting. He told me the names of some among whom were senior officers. He told me of one senior officer that he had ordered to be shot because he had sexually abused a woman, another who had stolen private property and another who had killed someone. He said that his intolerance of abuse was well known amongst the armed forces. He was always happy to tell me about the things he had done that he considered to be good but never volunteered any information about the bad things he had been involved in.

Q: How was Saddam when you saw him for the first time?

Ali Bapir: I did not see him when he first arrived, which was about 4 or 5 months after me. I saw him about 10 to 15 days after that. I could not really see him that well as his back was to me but I recognized his shape and the guards confirmed that it was him. I think on that first occasion I saw him, they were taking him for medical treatment.

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Q: Mamosta, given all Saddam's previous power and might, how did you feel about him being imprisoned in this way?

Ali Bapir: I remembered all the Pharaohs, Namroods and Abu Jahls who had been brought low and I felt that this was their inevitable destiny. Saddam believed that when he spoke, Iraq spoke. His followers saw him as the only possible leader, someone they believed to be absolutely indispensible to Iraq. He had hundreds of nicknames, all testifying to his personal power and glory but, despite all of that, he was on the wrong path and promoted policies that were wrong for his people. He wanted his people to deify him, and the inevitable outcome of that hubris was that he ended up in an American prison, humiliated and guarded by female warders. Before he was imprisoned he had power and regarded himself not only as the leader of his nation but as something more than that, he had grandiose dreams of leading a united Arab nation. I thought to myself that someone who is so puffed up with pride that he forgets who he truly is was always going to be a hostage to that reputation and it will in the end be his undoing.

Q: Were you pleased that Saddam was in prison?

Ali Bapir: Of course I was happy about that, especially when I remembered the circumstances of the Kurdish and Iraqi peoples and all the injustices that the Ba'ath party inflicted on them under his leadership. However, I have to be honest, my feelings were somewhat ambivalent because I also found it hard to accept that someone who was ostensibly a Muslim and the leader of a Muslim country being imprisoned by infidels. I totally disapproved of his actions, which had brought him to where he now was, and which had re-

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sulted in a Muslim country being occupied by a non-Muslim power. In that respect, he was my enemy and the enemy of the Iraqi people. He was a dictator, someone responsible for vile repression and for that I welcomed his humiliation but always, at the same time, was that nagging feeling of discomfort at his treatment by the American superpower. There was another aspect to my disquiet. I believe that Saddam would not have dared to do what he did unless he had been backed by powerful western states, particularly the U.S. If none of them had supported him, whether covertly or overtly, he could not possibly have embarked on the policies he did. At the very least, they turned a blind eye to what he was doing. Remember the Ba'athists were in power for over 30 years before the occupation.

Q: If you had had the opportunity to meet Saddam in prison, what would you have told him?

Ali Bapir: I would have said to him the very same things which I told others in prison, probably more, given half a chance. I think I would have been even more intense in my denunciation of his actions and more damning in my rebukes. His colleagues constantly claimed that he was the real power, the main decision maker, therefore, in my view he deserved to be held to account more than anyone else.

Q: When his two sons were killed, did the news filter through to you?

Ali Bapir: Yes it did. They brought the bodies to Camp Cropper and Saddam's relatives were brought to view them. They also insisted on Ali Hassan Al-Majid and Barzan seeing the corpses and confirm that they were Saddam's sons. Consequently, news quickly spread in the camp that Uday and

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Qussay, and Qussay's son, had been killed and that the bodies had been identified.

Q: What was the reaction of your fellow prisoners?

Ali Bapir: The majority were saddened.

Q: Did they say that they were sad?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they did. They definitely seemed upset and some read part of a poem praising Saddam for being faithful to his country and not leaving it. The result of that decision was his sons were killed and he himself was arrested. The Ba'athists said that no one had the right to blame him as he had been truthful about what he believed, did not flee to save himself or his family, and did not desert his people. They saw him as a leader who, against all the odds, had stayed on the battlefield until the end.

Q: Mamosta, is it true that Dr. Abdulmunim, the Minister of Endowment, did not like the fact that you used the nickname 'Tikrity' for him?

Ali Bapir: Yes.

Q: Why?

Ali Bapir: He did not like it because in his view Tikrity was a nickname given to those who thought they were above everyone else and abused others. He was adamant that he had never abused anyone and did not regard himself as better than anyone else. He claimed that the regime was hostile to him because he was the Minister of Endowment. He said that he was asked to carry out illegal operations, which he refused to do, and that was why he was so hated. I asked others about them and the consensus was that he had been a polite

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and shy person and one who always wanted to work within the law. He was an expert in Islamic Sharia law. Despite that, he refused to become an Imam and lead prayers. He told me that I was better qualified than he to undertake that role and encouraged me to take it on. We did spend time together talking and praying and I was impressed that he had memorized the Quran.

Q: Did you discuss anything with him that led to an argument?

Ali Bapir: With him no, but with others, who were members of the Revolutionary Command Council and the Regional Command, yes. We often had very heated debates but the Minister of Endowment either remained the silent or sided with me. Since he had a sound knowledge of Islam, he often supported me. He did often remain quiet which I attributed to his shyness and was wary of supporting me too obviously in front of his former colleagues.

Q: During your discussions, did you talk about the alliance between the Ba'athist regime and the U.S. which continued until the uprising of 1991 in Kurdistan and southern Iraq? The U.S. totally backed the regime, despite its crimes, in its wars and co-operated fully with it. Did you ever ask them to explain this alliance with the U.S.?

Ali Bapir: They never really talked about that. The only thing they did say was that they had worked with the U.S. and that the U.S. had co-operated with them over trade and a number of political matters. They said that this co-operation lasted until the Americans became exasperated over Ba'athist intransigence, as they saw it, over the Palestinian issue or their opposition to Zionism. At that point the Americans,

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through an Arab intermediary, whose name had to be kept confidential, said that they had to stop supporting Palestine and antagonizing Israel. Saddam consulted his Revolutionary Command Council and his Regional Command members, and they all felt that Iraq should not change its stance on those issues. The Ba'athists claimed that the Americans were more than willing to deal with them in all kinds of ways but that was conditional on abandoning the Palestinians and accepting Israel.

I asked them why and how they had supported the Palestinians to which they replied that they provided monetary compensation to the families of Palestinians killed by the Israelis and also paid for the rebuilding of houses destroyed by Israeli bombing or security forces. Many of these senior figures in the regime felt that they had done a great deal to support the Palestinian cause to the extent that in the end that support resulted in the destruction of their own country while not, ultimately, enabling the Palestinians to rebuild their future. The support for the Palestinians antagonized the Israelis and that too, ultimately, had repercussions for Iraq in the form of numerous problems. Many of them felt that the policy of support for Palestine was misguided.

Q: Mamosta, did any of those leaders admit to you their part in any crime, or indicate any regret for their involvement?

Ali Bapir: None of them ever admitted to me any direct personal involvement in any crime but in general terms a number did concede that certain policies had been mistakes and that things had been done by the government of which they were part that they now thought to be wrong. Some had different perceptions about what had happened or felt that they were far from the actual decision making process, or

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were no longer in post when certain decisions were taken, so could not be blamed for what took place. I never heard one of them take any personal responsibility.

Q: How did you assess the relationships among the Ba'athist leaders?

Ali Bapir: By and large, they did not seem to get on well with each other. They quarreled incessantly and I asked them about their attitude to each other. I put it to them that these constant disagreements between them was conclusive proof, if any was needed, that they had been wrong. To me, truth unites people while lies divides them. Many agreed with me. I resolved quite a few angry quarrels between them, some of these rows nearly ended in physical violence. All of these rows were just a symptom of the discord amongst them. All of them disliked Tikrities and one, who was a military officer and a Shiite, told me that Saddam's son-in-law, whose name was Jamal, led all the ministers by the nose and there was not one minister or member of the Regional Leadership who dared to even cough in front of him. I asked him how that could be as I did not know of any official position that he held. The reply was that the only status he needed was to be a member of Saddam's family, in his case his son-in-law. He said all of the senior figures deferred to Saddam's family, his relatives and Tikrities.

The Ba'athists in prison with me felt Saddam's inner circle monopolized everything for themselves, everything was under their control, and they regarded ordinary people as counting for nothing, but they were always at odds with each other.

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Q: Other than this minister, were there other Shiites among them?

Ali Bapir: There were other Shi'ites. Mizban Khidir Hadi was a Shi'ite and was a member of Revolutionary Command Council. There were other Shi'ites on the Regional Command Council and there were Shi'ite ministers, but Sunnis were in the majority.

Q: Did they ever discuss the last U.S. war on Iraq, and the role they played in that war? Did they have any explanation for why they were defeated so quickly in that war?

Ali Bapir: They did talk quite a bit about that and gave various explanations but the main one was that they felt they had embarked on a war for which they had not prepared, and that their rhetoric was greater than their capabilities. The result was an unequal war. I brought up the fact that the whole world thought that Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction(WMD), chemical weapons and biological weapons. Some believed that Saddam had nuclear weapons. Since they did not have those weapons, I asked why their words were so belligerent when they did not have the hardware to back them up. My view was that their exaggerations put them in the wrong and gave the U.S. the excuse they were looking for. They were only too happy to believe Saddam's claims.

What I did not understand was that although everyone was convinced that Iraq had WMD, once it was clear that there were none, why the regime had not announced that they did not have those weapons? I thought that they should have admitted that they had hoodwinked the international community. The Ba'athist response was that they had denied having WMD on numerous occasions but were not believed, even after the searches.

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Q: Did they admit that there were no WMD left in Iraq at the time of the invasion?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they said that they had all been destroyed, or never had them in the first place.

Q: What was the reason for their defeat?

Ali Bapir: They believed the reason for their defeat was that they had not assessed the situation correctly, underestimated the level of military technology available to the U.S., and overestimated the capabilities of the Iraqi forces.

Some of them believed that the U.S. would never actually go to war because of the strong anti-war sentiment in the U.S. They realised, after, that they put too much weight on the mass demonstrations and protests about any military action in Iraq. Others thought that the real mistake was not using the weapons they did have effectively and not using their troops to the best advantage. Their assessment was that the U.S. focused on the south and that they had responded by sending troops to Um Qasr, to Basra, and places like that. Then they switched quickly to concentrate on Baghdad and, in effect, took the heart and lungs of the country and after that made defence almost impossible. They seemed genuinely to believe that it was better to die for their principles as Saddam advocated, even if that meant that the Americans occupied the country. To summarise, some thought America would never attack Iraq, others were convinced they would and American strength would make it an unequal struggle but thought they should die bravely in defence of their principles no matter what the cost.

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Q: Do you know anything about the stories on one of the media channels of mutinies among the Iraqi troops?

Ali Bapir: I asked them whether those stories were true but they vehemently denied it. I pushed on this and asked whether there was any truth in the claim that some senior officers in the army and the intelligence services had links with the U.S., and that this had played a major part in the defeat U.S. military superiority that was the major reason for their defeat? Again they said that the accusation was untrue. They accepted that one or two may have been disloyal but they did not think that that had any significant impact on the outcome of the war. There was general agreement that the American attack had been vicious and that it was their success in destroying the Iraqi war machine and killing so many troops that was the crucial factor. Those defeats demoralised many of them and it may well be, as some of the leaders said to me, that many were not that enamoured of the regime and not that inclined to defend it. One general, whose name I will not reveal, intimated to me that he saw the Americans as saviours of the people. He welcomed the toppling of the regime and seemed unfazed by his position.

Q: He was a General?

Ali Bapir: Yes, and he was famous, but I will not name him.

Q: Did any of the officials take any part in the fighting?

Ali Bapir: Yes, many of them told me that they had participated in the fighting.

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Q: Mamosta, how did those leaders describe Saddam, his sons and his family? Did they still respect him even in the prison? Did they still regard him as their leader, or did they regard him as the source of all disasters visited on Iraq?

Ali Bapir: Of those who were close to me, I would say half saw him as a great man, as a leader, but others did see him and his family as the source of Iraq's troubles and characterised him as a dictator who did not listen to anyone outside his inner circle.

Q: Did any of those who considered themselves Saddam's opponents ever consider mounting a coup against him and his regime?

Ali Bapir: Those in prison had all stayed with Saddam. Those that might have considered a coup were all dead. Some did tell me that an attempted coup had taken place and one or two claimed to have been involved. They thought that they would have been executed and put their survival down to the regime having insufficient evidence of their involvement, or overlooked them because of their tribal affiliation. One said that he had been involved in a plot led by his relatives, all of whom had subsequently been executed. He assumed that he was not arrested because of lack of information. The majority, however, were made up of those who stayed loyal to Saddam.

Q: Can we know the name of the one who survived the coup?

Ali Bapir: He was a General but I do not think that any good would come of disclosing his identity.

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Q: Did Ali Hassan Al-Majid and others talk about their arrests?

Ali Bapir: His friends were reluctant to do so but eager to know what had transpired. They asked me to enquire about it and I did. I asked him first of all whether he had been captured or surrendered. He replied in a curious way saying that neither applied to him. He said that he took the decision not to go into hiding and instead remained in a place that the Americans knew him to be. So, he did not actually surrender but neither did he take any steps to avoid arrest as he could have done. He said that he knew he would be arrested at some point.

Q: Did he tell you where this place was?

Ali Bapir: No, he did not. Many of them had surrendered themselves, a few had been arrested, and some fled to Syria but were refused asylum and had to return to Iraq where they were then arrested. The majority stayed in Iraq and either surrendered or were arrested by the Americans.

Q: Were any of them wounded in the fighting or during their arrests?

Ali Bapir: It is possible that some did and they had healed but I saw no evidence of any wounds so I cannot say for certain.

Q: Mamosta, in general, how would you assess their psychological states in prison? Do you think that they managed to maintain a high level of morale or had they been totally demoralized by their defeat and capture?

Ali Bapir: Some of them were in good spirits and others were demoralized. I think the level of demoralization can be linked to their age and their state of health. A number had

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varying ailments, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and a number had kidney problems. Those conditions exacerbated their overall situation and they appeared to me to be even more likely to be physically weak and susceptible to humiliation. Some put on a brave front but when confronted by interrogators they crumbled. Some reported one another to the Americans and gave information about others to their interrogators. This all seemed to me to be manifestations of demoralization. Others remained defiant throughout and never seemed to give in to the hopelessness that afflicted others, but they were in the minority. There was a complete mixture of types and a range of responses to the situation we found ourselves in.

Q: To follow upon that point about informing on one another, particularly in court, did that lead to squabbling amongst them?

Ali Bapir: Yes it did. The Americans kept some of them as witnesses against others so that they could testify in court.

Q: Did they bicker about that?

Ali Bapir: Yes, there were numerous quarrels and rows.

Q: Could you tell me the names of any of them?

Ali Bapir: No. I do not believe it would be appropriate. I can tell you that they were very suspicious of each other, there was constant backbiting and accusations made against each other about informing. Some claimed to have recognized the handwriting of the colleagues who had denounced them to the Americans and others who were convinced that they had been denounced by colleagues, even when there was no proof at all. A few tried to play detective and would con-

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clude that someone had informed on them by working out who had known what and when and from that drawing a conclusion as to who any likely informer might be, based on what the Americans seemed to know. It was a very dysfunctional situation.

Q: You said earlier that some of them had heard of you and your views. Did any of them know you particularly well?

Ali Bapir: I do not think so. They only knew that I was political member of the Islamic Movement, was with Iraqi opposition, and worked against the Ba'athist regime. Some were aware that the regime had reached out to me but I had refused to engage with them.

One of them was of Abd Hmud. One day, during break time, I passed by his room and he asked me why I had never replied to the many letters he had sent me. He said he regretted that as if we had developed links he believed that the Ba'athists would have supported and co-operated with us. I agreed that I had never replied to his letters but asked him to make that clear to the Americans because one of the accusations against me was that I had ties to the regime. I said it was a little ironic that he was now criticizing me for not having such links! He could not believe that the Americans had made such an accusation and said that I was nearly unique in not having ties to the regime. He also said that the Americans had asked him if I had any involvement with the regime to which he claimed he had replied that I did not and, on the contrary, was well known for my opposition to the regime. He told them that the Ba'athists saw me as an intransigent enemy. He added that the Americans had told him that they knew all the accusations against me were false. I found that perplexing because at the time when he was being told this

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I was still being questioned about my supposed links to the regime. I never ever received any apology over these false accusations.

Q: Mamosta, how many times did the Ba'athists try to bring you into their fold? You may have already answered this question in your answer to the previous question...

Ali Bapir: Abd Hamd blamed me for refusing to communicate and I certainly accepted that I never responded to any of their many overtures.

Q: Did any of these leaders, including Abd Hmud, talk about the relationship between members of other Kurdish parties with the Ba'athist regime? After the collapse of the Ba'athist regime, many documents were released revealing that a number of key figures and officials had ties with the regime. Did they tell you the names of any of them?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they mentioned the names of many they claimed had ties to the regime. I suspect the majority of those they named did have such ties but some, I believe, did not. I do not think it is appropriate for me to name anyone as I do not know whether the accusations are true or not. I would not want anyone bandying my name about in these circumstances. However, yes, they said how they had met Kurdish officials in Baghdad, Mosul and Kirkuk, and mentioned the names of Kurdish figures in other Kurdish parties that they say they had met. I am not willing to say more as I have no definite proof of any links between Ba'athists and Kurdish leaders.

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Q: Did they claim that these ties existed in the near past?

Ali Bapir: Both recently and a long time ago. They named many people but I have not spoken about this to anyone until now except in the most general terms. I understand only too well how people can fabricate stories about you so I do not wish to engage in that kind of speculation, even if what they said was true. Even were it true, I have no way of knowing whether someone had been forced to co-operate with the Ba'athists or whether an individual's circumstances were such that, in effect, he had no choice. It does not follow that anyone who had any ties to the regime necessarily intended harm to his own people. I have no doubt that some of those Kurds who did co-operate were motivated out of greed or a desire to have a fallback position in the event that the U.S. failed us. I see it as inappropriate to judge or jump to conclusions. I have friends, particularly among the KDP and PUK, who have never denied that they had limited commercial and diplomatic ties with the regime. They will tell you openly that delegations went back and forth between them. There were, I have been told, also more secret relationships that involved Kurds facilitating trade for some within the regime. In general, I cannot make any assessment about whether what the Ba'athist prisoners said about particular Kurdish individuals having ties to them was true or not and have no way of knowing, even if it was true, what the motivation was for those links. However, they did talk about this issue a great deal.

Q: Were any of those they named prominent leaders who held high office in Kurdistan?

Ali Bapir: Yes, one or two.

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Q: Mamosta, did you ask them whether they had any ties with those Islamic parties ?

Ali Bapir: They mentioned one person who was with us some time ago. I do not know if they were telling the truth.

Q: Can we know his name?

Ali Bapir: No. If I will not give the names of those I do not consider to be Muslim, I am not likely to offer up the name of someone I consider to be an Islamist. The same rationale I gave for maintaining confidentiality that I gave you in relation to those individuals applies equally to a fellow Muslim.

Q: Does he still have position in any of the Islamic movements?

Ali Bapir: Let us just move on at this point, I do not wish to go into details.

Q: As you wish Mamosta. During your answers to my questions you mentioned the Ba'athist leaders playing dominos and backgammon. How else did they spend their time in prison?

Ali Bapir: Those who were housed near to me were influenced by me and they spent their time reciting and memorizing the Quran. Some of them memorized up to a half and if they did not fully understand the verses they were memorizing I explained them. That instruction tended to take place during exercise time. I sometimes heard others who were not housed near to me reading the Quran aloud, or discussing issues with their immediate neighbours. While they were in their cells, they prayed, read the Quran, when outside they often played chess, dominoes, dama and cards but not for

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the money. I was asked whether playing chess for money was Haram, that is forbidden. I told them that this was a matter of dispute between Islamic scholars but as far as I was concerned if the game was played for money and involved winners and losers it was definitely Haram. Some scholars argue that even if money is not involved it is still Haram, while others saw it as a mental exercise which was permissible. Games such as dama or dominoes, where money is not involved, is seen as a mere game and so is permissible. They said that as they were in prison they would abide by my interpretation. I joked a little bit with them and suggested that they were stealing the entire herd but asking for the red calf!!

One of them talked to me once about his sins and confessed that while at university he had looked at girls. He wanted to know what my ruling on behaviour of that kind was. I laughed at that and he was puzzled and asked me why I was amused. I said it was because his question reminded me of an incident I had heard about. I told him a story about a man from Kufa who went to Abdullah ibn Umer (May God be satisfied with him) and asked him what the punishment was for killing a mosquito. He asked the man where he was from and he replied that he was from Kufa, which is in Iraq. Abdullah then said, "O people of Iraq, woe unto you, you are shedding the blood of Hussein (the Prophet's Grandson) and here you are asking the punishment for killing a mosquito!!"

I said that he had told me about very serious things he had done and yet here he was focusing on looking at girls! He gave a reasoned response though and said that he had repented of those major sins but he had not yet repented of his minor ones, such as looking lustfully at women. He also said he needed to know whether he had to repent of those

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sins too. I answered that yes, he did have to repent of even the smallest sin, and pray that God would forgive him.

They spent most of their time in those ways, reading the Quran inside, and outside they exercised, sat talking to one another, occasionally arguing or playing games.

Q: Did any of them ever admit participating in killing anyone?

Ali Bapir: No, no they did not talk about anything like that.

Q: Do you believe that your instruction led to any of them ever truly repenting for what they had done?

Ali Bapir: Only Allah knows if anyone ever truly repents but I believe that some did. For example, one of them asked me what he had to do to earn Allah's forgiveness and I replied that he first must have faith and reject any creed but Islam. Only Allah could be worshipped and he had to regard the Prophet (peace be upon him) as his leader. I advised him that he had to cleanse his mind of the teachings of Michel Aflaq and his party and make the Quran and the Sunna his guides. He said he would do all of that but wanted to know if he needed to do more and I suggested that he pray, and in fact he could start there and then. He said that he had prayed in the past but had stopped. I asked him whether he still felt himself to be a Muslim when he stopped praying and he was puzzled by my question. I explained that a non-believer might not adhere to the Pillars of Islam but scholars generally agree that anyone who thought of himself as a Muslim must make up the prayers, or fasts, he had missed. While I was there he strove to make up the 8 years of missed prayers and fasts. He told me that he constantly asked Allah for forgiveness, especially when reciting the Quran. Others asked

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that on the day of judgment that I bear witness that they had repented of their sins and became servants of Allah.

Q: Who were they?

Ali Bapir: Again, I will not divulge the names of individuals. They were my followers and I have a duty to them.

Q: You said that you led the Ba'athists group in their prayers or you offered them advice. This indicates that they held you in some respect. How did they treat you on a personal level while you were in prison?

Ali Bapir: At the start they viewed me through the prism of nationalism and ethnicity. If I criticized Saddam and Michel Aflaq, or others of that ilk, they responded by making accusations against Mam Jalal or Kak Masud or Kurdish leaders. I tried to tell them that they were misunderstanding what I was saying and that I was speaking to them from an Islamic perspective. I wanted them to understand that I saw my people as being oppressed and that we co-operated with the leaders of all Kurdish groups in an effort to achieve the liberation of the Kurdish people. All Kurds were united in wanting to throw off the oppression that we all had to endure and all of us wanted a free and independent Kurdistan. We did, inevitably, differ on many other policy aspects and had very different ideas on how life in a free Kurdistan should be lived. Many of the Kurdish leaders were from a secular political background while I saw the world through Islamist eyes. The Ba'athists, in the end, saw that my primary motivation was the propagation of Islam and secondary to that were my aspirations for Kurdistan. Once they realized my fundamental position, they became less inclined to become angry with what I said. I emphasized what we shared, and

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if they wanted to be part of the wider Muslim community I wanted to help them understand what they needed to do to achieve that goal. To that end, I constantly quoted from the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him). I showed then where there was common ground between us, even though they were Arab and I was a Kurd, and that fact could never change. If a relationship could only be based on our ethnicity then, I said, there would never be one. However, our adherence to Islam was a far more important factor than whether we were Arab or Kurd. With God's favour this perspective gradually came to be understood by many of them. I called adhan 5 times a day, I led collective prayers, and when outside I delivered sermons on many topics. In the last period before my release my sermons were generally delivered after Asr and on Fridays I led the prayers 4 times. I also led the Eid prayers and, when required, funeral prayers. All through this I was asked for clarifications of religious matters and answered numerous questions on Islam.

Occasionally, I received extra food or clothes from home or from well-wishers and I was often sent desserts which I would pass on to others. If someone fell ill, I prayed for them and generally I tried to greet all of them and help them whenever I could. They remarked on my support and said that they were surprised that I even greeted them, let alone do the other things I did for them. They also acknowledged that I did not damn them for what they had done in their previous lives but rather it seemed to them that I was genuinely concerned to help them find the true path and so gain a future in the next world. As always, when remarks like that were made, I replied that it was not up to me to punish them, especially in the circumstances in which they found them-

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selves. For me, they were my fellow human beings and had to be treated in accordance to Allah's injunctions. What they had done in their lives should, if they repented and changed, not mean they are deprived of the afterlife promised by God. I pitied them and wanted to help, particularly when they expressed a readiness to understand Islam and a willingness to return to Allah and live as he would wish. I was always conscious of the fact that one day they would be released and rejoin society. My hope was that they would do so with a new mind set, based on Islamic values and a commitment to a new and better way of life. If I could achieve that goal I believed they as individuals, society in general, and even me, would all be the winners. I was aware that my influence over many of them grew as time passed and there was one who said to me that if I ordered a strike, or commanded any particular action to be taken within the prison, then my orders would be obeyed. For me, that statement showed how much I was trusted and respected and I believe that even the American interrogators conceded that I was a man of principle. I received a letter from the prison authorities every 6 months, as did other prisoners, outlining their reasons for keeping me imprisoned. The other prisoners became aware of what reasons were given for my imprisonment and wrote to the administrators asking that these accusations were investigated further and that I be released. All this I found moving and evidence of my standing among them.

I myself wrote a letter, a copy of which I still have and which I will release to the public when the appropriate time comes[1].I read my letter to my fellow prisoners which rejected the 4 main accusations of which I had been accused

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(1) For the actual letter and its response please see the ADDITIONS section, following TOPIC 9.

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and which outlined the American response to my rebuttals of the claims made against me. They were dumbfounded at the strength of my denials. The one thing they asked me to do in my letter of response to the Americans was to include a plea for their release which I puzzled me and I asked them why I should do that. They said that it was normal practice and that they had to ask for everything at every opportunity in the hope that some requests might be granted. I told them that I would rather die than make such a request and they were clearly perplexed. I explained that I would not even ask for permission to make a telephone call as the rules demanded because, as far as I was concerned, I had a right to make such calls without their permission. The Americans set themselves up as the guardians of democracy and human decency yet denied us the most basic of internationally recognized rights. I told them that I would never beg the Americans for anything to which we were entitled as of right. My final point to them was that if Allah decreed that we were to be released, then we would be without any need to beg the U.S. authorities, and if he decreed otherwise, then no number of petitions to the Americans would make the slightest difference. They saw my point, agreed with me, but conceded that they were weak.

In fact, I was reminded of a verse in the Quran, when almighty Allah through the words of two fellow prisoners who were with Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him): "And there entered the prison with him two young men. One of them said, 'Indeed, I have seen myself [in a dream] pressing wine'. The other said, 'Indeed, I have seen myself carrying upon my head [some] bread, from which the birds were eating. Inform us of its interpretation; indeed, we see you to be of those who do good"(Yusuf:36). I pondered a long time over the meaning of this verse and I came to the conclusion

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that the meaning was that the best each can do for himself is to do the best for others. The prisoner needs others to help him, whether that is a good deed, a cheery greeting, financial support or prayers, because a prisoner is not in a position to help himself. I made this verse the basis of my treatment of my fellow prisoners.

I tried to be pleasant and considerate with the guards too and they noticed. I was told, for example, by some of those who had a better command of English that some guards had asked them why so many of them frowned at them all the time while I always had a smile for them and seemed to be content. They asked them why I was like that and I told them what I had told the guards themselves, that is that my contentment stemmed from the instruction from our Prophet (peace be upon him) that the Muslim must always have a cheerful face and talk kindly to all. Many of the guards were hired employees, on contracts, and did not necessarily support U.S. policies. For me, there was no reason to hate them. There were those among the guards who openly voiced their disapproval of the U.S. and George Bush, and some said that if they survived they would not return home. I did not hate them because I understood that they were in Iraq trying to make a living and, even though they were part of the invading force, I could not bring myself to glower and frown at people who were only doing their jobs. The bottom line for me was that being miserable and unkind to them harmed me and made me as uncomfortable as they were. I preferred, where possible, to walk together and take the opportunity to indulge in some pleasant conversation. My attitude to the members of the Red Cross was exactly the same, by which I mean I acted in accordance with Muslim precepts and the Islamic code. Islam urges us all to be positive and be cheerful

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whenever we can, rejoicing in the blessings of Allah. It is due to those blessings they all respected and believed me. If they had problems, they came to me to have them resolved either as individuals, in twos or in groups. Thanks to Allah they had a great deal of respect for me.

Q: You have talked of mercy. Is it true that in an interview with the Guardian newspaper's correspondent you asked forgiveness for them despite their crimes?

Ali Bapir: That is not true. There can be no forgiveness for those who have abused the rights of others. As for returning to Allah and repentance, I told each of them that that was a matter between them and God. If their repentance was genuine then, I said, Allah might forgive them for their failings in carrying out His commands but as for the rights of human beings, they had to return the rights taken away. Scholars have mused on this issue of repentance and a return to Allah but all agree that for a repentance to be accepted means that amends must be made and stolen rights returned. Only then can it be said that the sinner has atoned for his sins. It was not for me to forgive them and I did not do so. I did tell the Americans that many of those who had surrendered themselves were low ranking officials and often there was no proof that they had committed any crime. I suggested that those prisoners should be released, particularly those were old or infirm. However, I would never have asked for forgiveness for those who had been party to the abuse of others or had played any part in crimes against our people. If someone is in debt to another, it is not acceptable to ask forgiveness for them. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Osama bin Zaid, as is reported in the Al-Bukhari Book of Traditions, a woman who belonged to a famous tribe had been found

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stealing. Her relatives sent Osama to the Prophet (peace be upon him) to ask him intercede in the case so that she would not suffer the punishment of having her hands chopped off as was decreed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked whether they were asking that one of the rulings handed down from Allah should not be applied and refused to intercede as they asked. The claim that I asked for forgiveness for those Ba'athists involved in atrocities is totally without foundation because I know of no Islamic basis upon which forgiveness for someone else in circumstances such as these, when the crimes involved are such serious abuse of the rights of others.

Q: Mamosta, what do you expect the outcome for them to be? Do you think they will be executed or sentenced to life imprisonment? Do you think any of them will be released?

Ali Bapir: I believe and have a firm conviction that none of them will be executed and the maximum punishment they will face is exile from Iraq or they will be imprisoned. I believe most will be released.

Q: Do you think Saddam will share the same fate?

Ali Bapir: Yes, Saddam too. I do not think they will hang him.

Q: Ali HassanAl-Majid?

Ali Bapir: As I said, I do not believe any of them will be executed, that is my belief. Of course, I could be wrong and they are all executed tomorrow but based on what I have picked up from the Americans I do not think that is likely. I think that American interests, and the current political climate, are now such that executions are unlikely.

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If, tomorrow, the U.S. decides that it is in its interests to negotiate with Ba'athists they will do so. The U.S. pursue its own agenda interests. Decent principles and values and basic justice would suggest that if people like Ali Hassan Al-Majid and Saddam are guilty of the crimes with which they are accused then they should face the ultimate penalty. That is the law, that is legal and such a punishment would be justified. The reality is, however, that U.S. interests determine such matters, not justice, and those interests change as circumstances evolve.

Q: Mamosta, were the lessons you gave planned on a daily basis or did you ask the Ba'athists what they wanted you to talk about?

Ali Bapir: In the main I chose the topic of the lessons but I was asked to speak to them about specific matters that they wanted to clarify. My lessons were mostly providing Quranic explanations and interpretations, as well as explanations of prophetic traditions from the Hadith.

Q: Did any of them, at any time during your imprisonment, say that they welcomed you leading prayers?

Ali Bapir: No one disagreed. Those who were housed near me, around 21 people in 3 divisions, were particularly supportive but prisoners from other divisions tried to be transferred to be nearer. One prisoner told me that he wanted to transfer as the Americans only allowed those housed near to me to come and discuss issues and to pray with me. Some were transferred nearer, or to my division, if there were empty rooms.

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Q: Can you give us any examples of occasions when you felt pity for, or co-operated with, them?

Ali Bapir: Yes I can. Some of them had vertebrate disease. They were old, and had to bring water in a small container or bucket for themselves. In each cell there was a large container to store water. Everyone had to take water from this container and the more elderly and infirm did not have the strength to do so, or could bring only an insufficient amount. I helped whenever I could by holding their jugs for them and things like that.

When I had extra clothes, or other things given to me, I gave them what I did not need. They reciprocated when they could but normally I took the initiative. I was often thanked for my generosity and when one of our number became ill I did my best to provide comfort and advice. I was inclined to correct anyone who in my view was saying something inappropriate, wrong or unkind and I would point out that such behaviour hurt the individual concerned apart from being against Islamic values and law.

Q: Mamosta, did you ever need their help at any time?

Ali Bapir: No, Allah created a situation that meant I was never in need of them at all. However, they were kind to me and some offered me items sent from home such as pistachios and nuts, even a dishdasha, Arabic clothing. I always politely declined as I did not need anything. One prisoner asked me to take something of his as a keepsake to remind me of him and, similarly, I was asked for small items that they could keep as tokens of remembrance. Allah had enabled me to live without these extra items but I felt that they did need my help. I saw them as my neighbours, or people with whom

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I shared a house, and according to Islamic tradition I had a duty to support them in whatever way I could. In return, they did not, at least in front of me, display any overt materialism. I was often asked to name something that I wanted so that they could have it brought from home and given to me as a gift. I believe that many who did that did so out of a sense of brotherhood and a desire to let me know that they appreciated and would not forget what I had done for them. They said often how indebted to me they felt for clarifying their religion, advising them when I could and I believe they did have a belief that they could never adequately repay me.

Q: In addition to the food the Americans provided you, there was a cigarette allowance. As you did not smoke, what did you do with them?

Ali Bapir: I had 2 meals a day, but fasted continuously for 7 months. In the later stages of my imprisonment I broke my fast once a month. It is recorded from the Hadith that the Prophet (peace be upon him) never fasted for a complete month, except in Ramadan. I saved one meal and gave it to those who needed it, such as those with diabetes or, if I had been given chicken, to those with cholesterol problems.

As for cigarettes, in the beginning I refused to take them. I believed they were Haram, and almighty Allah says in the Quran: "And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression"(Al-Maidah:2). I felt that to help people make themselves ill through smoking was both wrong for them and for me. However, Minister of Endowment, Dr. Abdulmunem, said to me said he would bear my sin and asked me to take the 6 cigarettes allowance because so many of the others were so desperate for additional cigarettes. He said that our situation in prison made for extraor-

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dinary circumstances and that as I did not smoke he was willing to take the burden of my sin on his shoulders to help the other prisoners. He was knowledgeable about Sharia law and argued that he could, under the law, bear this responsibility on my behalf at the Day of Judgment. I pondered what he had said and found myself between the devil and the deep blue sea. I did not want to upset my fellow prisoners by refusing to give them something I neither needed or wanted but, on the other hand, I did not want to be a party to them becoming ill through smoking. In the end, I decided that appearing to be uncooperative with my fellow inmates, unkind even, was the greater of the evils confronting me. I needed them to be open to listening to me so that I could instruct them. Since Dr. Abdulmunem was prepared to bear the responsibility, in reality, my decision was based on the legal case. In a situation when the choice is between two evils, the decision as to which course of action to take has to be based on which is the lesser evil. My conclusion that angering them by what they would see as my selfishness or meanness was a far greater evil than enabling some of them to smoke a cigarette or so more each day. I judged that they did not understand that smoking was Haram in the way that I did. Some of them said that not all scholars agreed that smoking was Haram, though they all knew that there was a consensus that it was an unpleasant habit, even though a few scholars might be smokers themselves. They tried to suggest that they had an understanding of the requirements of Islam and that they did not understand why I was insisting that only my interpretation mattered.

I realized that I could not convince all of them that smoking was Haram or that what they were doing to their bodies was a form of suicide. One of those to whom I gave my cigarettes was Tariq Aziz.

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Q: How many cigarettes did you give him?

Ali Bapir: Six cigarettes on each occasion, he was very pleased.

Q: Mamosta, did you talk with Tariq Aziz or Taha Yassin Ramadan about anything?

Ali Bapir: They were not in our division but yes, for short periods, when we were standing together during exercise time or when we were being taken to the bathroom, though that was a very short walk. We exchanged a few sentences, greetings and so forth but we did not have much opportunity to talk much as they were housed elsewhere and then 11 of them were transferred to a different location when it was decided that they should face trial.

Q: Did any of them ask you directly for your cigarette ration?

Ali Bapir: Yes, there were some who were upset that they had not received any of my cigarette allowance. The prison authorities changed how they distributed the cigarettes and gave them out in packets, 3 or 4 at a time, each month. At that point I was able to share my quota out more equitably. One of my next door neighbours wanted me to give him my whole allowance but keep that fact between us. However, I pointed out that there were many who were also desperate for any extra ration. When the system changed I did give him a whole packet to himself and the rest I spread throughout my own and other divisions.

Q: Did you give cigarettes to Ali HassanAl-Majid?

Ali Bapir: No, he was a non-smoker.

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Q: Did any of the prisoners entrust you with anything to be delivered for them after your release? Did any of them make any recommendations as to what you should say or do when you were freed?

Ali Bapir: Yes to both. They asked, for example, that I tell Mam Jalal that they had been wronged and to tell Kak Masud about their situation. I talked to some of them about that kind of thing but the key messages they wanted known were how they were being treated, and their hope that they would be released as soon as possible.

Q: Some of them were released before you. I believe one of them was Doctor Abdulmunim, the Minister of Endowment in the previous Ba'athist regime. News of his release was spread widely. Did you entrust him with anything to bring to the outside?

Ali Bapir: No, Kak Howzhin between me and you, I had a very clear sense of personal integrity. I tried not ask anyone for favours or insist that anyone do anything for me. When Dr. Abdumunim came to see me before his release, he did not have a chance to say goodbye. He mentioned this later and mentioned that I hoped that my friends and family might receive news about me from him. At that time I had had no news or letters from home for 9 months, so I had no idea how my family was.

Q: During the times when you were instructing the Ba'athists, how did you feel about all of these senior figures, including ministers, sitting listening to you?

Ali Bapir: I saw myself as a teacher and they were my students. I knew things that they did not know. I was convinced that if they had known about Islam, and had been educated

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by Islamic teachers, there would have been no need, then, to teach them even the most basic things like how to make a proper ablution. They did not know the rules of prayer, the proper way to eat, to speak and to behave. They had to be taught all the important tenets of Islam. They just did not have enough knowledge or understanding of what it meant to be a Muslim. I am not saying they knew absolutely nothing but what they knew was totally inadequate for them to be practicing Muslims. They admitted as much themselves and welcomed my lectures on the history of Islam, beliefs, values, piety, life after death, the Day of Judgment, paradise and hell, the Islamic rule and politics. When we were talking about the Islamic state, the Islamic entity, they were curious and asked me where the Islamic state was, and in which Ayah, or verse, that it was mentioned. I had written a book, and in it I talked in detail about the Islamic state, the Islamic entity, and I told them to read the book and they would find the rationale for the foundation and internal policy of this entity, what its foreign policy, judiciary, external relations and economy, should be. In it I explained that the Islamic state is one in which Islam dictates all aspects of life. They eventually understood that Islam is all embracing.

As I was teaching them, I felt that they were strangers to Islam and this is something I find of all secularists in general. They are ignorant of Islam, often their total knowledge of Islam is that it is about a relationship between God and man, that it has specific rituals and involves personal worship. They have no idea of the 6000 and more verses available that cover whatever is necessary for this life and preparation for the next.

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Q: While you were in prison, a number of Ba'athist leaders were put on trial. You mentioned that they separated some of them. After their return, did they talk about their trials? We saw only censored scenes from the those court appearances.

Ali Bapir: The 11 who were separated and tried were housed in a different location from us and we never saw them again. We had limited information passed on from various sources about who had said what about who. For example, when Saddam was on trial he talked about Tariq Aziz and information about what he had said was passed from one to another. Such information was extremely unreliable as there was no way of corroborating any of it as we had no direct contact with the accused, and had no way of knowing for sure what they had said in response to the accusations made against them. Many of them who remained with us and were not put on trial faced very uncertain futures while their fate was being determined and, of course, those were anxious times for them.

Q: During their trials, in public appearances and in photographs after their arrest, many of the Ba'athist leaders seem to have grown a beard. The most obvious was Abd Hmud, Saddam Hussein's private secretary. Do you have any explanation for this?

Ali Bapir: Initially, shaving was difficult in prison as was trimming mustaches because no one was allowed to keep any sharp implement like scissors or knives. The guards had to bring you even mirrors or glasses. Sometimes cutting your hair was forbidden. One prisoner's hair was very thick and they cut it with trimmers twice. That proved difficult so the guard resorted to scissors but gave up when they became blunt!

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Q: Can you tell us his name?

Ali Bapir: His name was Khalid and he was released fairly quickly. The prisoners had to cut each other's hair. It was difficult and that is probably why some of them let their beards grow because they either could not find a blade at all or only with a great deal of difficulty. Some, however, grew their beards as an indication of their sorrow and one or two, I suspect, grew them because they wished to follow Sunna, and the lead of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Q: Is there not confusion for Arab nationalists and chauvinists with the phenomenon in the Arab world that rulers turn to Islamists and became Islamists themselves only when they have been defeated? The suggestion has been made that these leaders jumped on the Islamic bandwagon in order to win popular support. Was the growing of a beard simply a manifestation of that phenomenon?

Ali Bapir: It may have been but Kak Hawzhin being an Islamist in prison was very dangerous. In prison, if someone had an Islamic appearance, or smelt like an Islamist, the Americans regarded him as very dangerous. I do not believe that people generally do things that put themselves in harm's way, or which suggests that he is a threat or a danger to others. In the prison, being seen as a Ba'athist was infinitely easier than being seen as an Islamist. The Americans treated Ba'athists much better than they did Islamists. Later, before I was released, they brought some Islamists to the prison and chained their hands and feet and threw them on carts as you might with corpses. They were taking them for interrogation, they were not allowed to walk, and their heads were covered. The treatment of Islamists was much harsher than anything they meted out to any others. For example, the

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senior Ba'athists had access to telephones and were allowed to receive letters and other items. On the other hand, for 7 months I was not allowed to receive anything. Eventually they gave me a bundle of 10 letters which they had confiscated and kept them from me. The letters were well out of date and contained information about my family. I had not known that my family was moved from Suleimani to Hawler. After the first year I was allowed to make calls. I had queried why the Ba'athists leaders had been allowed calls while I, a known opponent of the regime and innocent of any crime, had not. Based on all of that, I think it unlikely that any of them wanted to be seen as Islamists. To have been so regarded would have brought more trouble down on their heads. I heard that when they showed Saddam on TV the question was asked whether the beard was to disguise himself, to demonstrate his Islamic credentials or simply because he had had no opportunity to shave. I do not know the answer to that.

Q: You spent most of your political life striving against the Ba'athist regime. How did you feel when you found yourself incarcerated with the leaders of that regime in such a confined space?

Ali Bapir: It was very difficult for me the first night when I saw them in the hall, it was like a shock. The following morning, I could not help myself confronting them. I was in pain and I told them that the Ba'athist regime was like a pain to me. They were, in my opinion, secularists and they countered this by saying that they knew I thought of them as evil parts of a dictatorial regime who had been deservedly arrested. They asked why, if I was so innocent, the Americans had imprisoned me. Their point was that the Americans arrested indiscriminately and imprisoned the guilty and the

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not guilty alike. In their view they, like me, fell into the latter category. I told them that if it was not for the instruction that all Muslims had to show mercy, and that they were in such distress, I would not even pass the time of day with them but I did pity them, given the circumstances to which they had been reduced. For me, human beings must always be treated with compassion no matter what. I took into consideration that those who had made mistakes yesterday, given the right guidance, could be set on the right path tomorrow. It was, in my opinion, better to help someone change than allow him to continue on the wrong path.

Q: Mamosta, did you tell them about your order that your brother was to be executed because he was Ba'athist?

Ali Bapir: Yes I did, and two or three of them cried.

Q: Who were the ones who cried?

Ali Bapir: One or two of them were ex-ministers and members of the Regional Command Council and the Revolutionary Command Council. They said that I really was a traditional Muslim because after the Prophet's companion no one had acted in such a way. I told them not to praise me and they said that they were only saying that to do what I had done was an example of the depth of my personal convictions They asked me if that was the only reason I had ordered my brother's death and I replied that it was.

Q: What are the instances involving the Ba'athist leaders in prison which you will never forget?

Ali Bapir: There were many. For example, one day an American guard, whose name was Michel, told me that he had noticed that when I called the faithful to prayer that

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some of the Ba'athists put their heads out of their cells and cried. He asked me why they did that. I told him that it was because I was talking about the greatness of God, almighty Allah, and they either yearned for that they knew that they had committed grave sins and were longing to come back into Allah's mercy. He said that he had noticed others, too, who cried when I called adhan and I said that this reaction was all down to Allah. Their hearts were beginning to soften and they were in transition to becoming religious and more kind people.

Another thing which sticks in my memory, related to two prisoners, one of them was a Palestinian and the other one an Egyptian. They both died in prison and we said the funeral prayers for them in their absence. This had a profound affect on me because I saw them as strangers and made a joke to my fellow prisoners that you had three strangers in their midst, a Palestinian, an Egyptian, and a Kurd, two of whom had passed away and now only one remained.

They wanted to re-assure me and said that, God willing, I would survive. I regarded those two as strangers, I did not know the reason for their arrest, though I assumed that the Palestinian was probably a high ranking member of the Palestinian Liberation Organization who fought against Israel. The Egyptian was a doctor and his problem was that he was an expert in explosives, so it is possible that he had ties to the regime, but I do not know for sure.

What is important is that he was Egyptian. I do not know whether the Egyptian media and newspapers followed his case but it is one that sticks in my mind.

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Q: How did these two prisoners die?

Ali Bapir: They died through illness. The Ba'athist prisoners suspected that they had been injected with something that had caused the deterioration in their health. They claimed that both had been healthy up until the time when they suddenly collapsed and died.

Q: During those 22 months that you spent with them in prison, was there any discussion about the two sides uniting? Were there any discussions about that possibility?

Ali Bapir: Yes, they talked a lot about that.

Q: Are there any among them that you would like to see again?

Ali Bapir: Yes, I would like to see some of them again though I will not identify them. I would especially like to see those that I believe I influenced and helped. I think that with the support of their tribes and families they can continue to turn their lives around and I would like to see them to encourage them on their paths. They insisted that we should meet up when we were all free and I agreed that, God willing, we would do that. We did not know who would be released first, or at all, but we agreed that whenever we could we would keep in contact.

I normally wore the uniform issued to prisoners in Guantanamo or Dishdasha, because they took away my Kurdish clothes. They were put in storage and I said that they would not see me in those clothes on the outside and they asked me how they would recognize me. In fact, a year before my release my Kurdish clothes were returned to me. I remember the day well. It was a Wednesday and the next day when they

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saw me in Kurdish dress for the first time I told them that they would now know how to recognize me if they came to Kurdistan to find me, as what I was now wearing would be what I was wearing then[1].

Many said they would come and see me, and some even insisted that they would join my party, though they did not even know its name! I said that was good but that we would see what happened when the time came. Many people wanted to see each other again after their release.

Q: Mamosta, would you be willing to see them now, after their release? Would you consider befriending them if they kept their promise to work with the Islamic Group? If you did do so, do you think that this might damage your reputation within he Islamic Group?

Ali Bapir: I believe people must be proud of the ability of someone in the Islamic Group having the ability to cleanse the minds of diehard Ba'athists and replace the corrupt ideology of Ba'athism with Islamic beliefs and values making them useful members of society. People must be proud that we can exert such influence on individuals who have in the past killed our people, deceived them or made them into spies. Now we had shown that we could guide them to the true path of Islam and recognition of our rights, as granted by us by the laws of almighty God. This is the most important point for Kurds, our people and the Islamic world too. A man, who until yesterday was a Ba'athist and regarded Kurds as second or third class citizens, now he recognized that Kurdish people were an entity and entitled to a guarantee of their continued existence. I told them that if someone

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(1) Apparently, I was talking with them in the frame of a nice word.

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agreed to adopt the Islamic way of life, he had to take on the whole package and could not pick and choose the bits they wanted to accept and ignore the rest. I do not care what others may say because God created all men who live on this earth to worship Him alone. It is incumbent upon the faithful to guide all of those, in so far as we can, so that they can be enlightened and become true servants to God. Such an outcome would be beneficial to themselves and their country. This approach is not a weakness that we should be ashamed of but a strength that we should celebrate.

Q: To change the subject, did any of their wives visit them in prison?

Ali Bapir: Yes, some of their wives or relatives did visit them.

Q: Did that include the family of Chemical Ali and the other senior leaders?

Ali Bapir: No, Ali Hassan Al Majid and others, no, I never heard of that while I was there. It may have happened after I had left but I do not know, but I have heard that some of the families of ministers, members of Command Council, had.

Q: Each Eid festival has its own special characteristic atmosphere and they generate very special emotions. You spent four Eids in prison. How did you spend them?

Ali Bapir: During the Eid days many of the prisoners cried and their eyes became red. They expressed surprise that I did not show any emotion at those times. I remember the Minister of Oil, A'mir Rashid, (there was another A'mir Rashid but the one with me was Dr. A'mir Rashid, the Minister of Oil and he was called Abu Fatin), coming to me after I had

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called everyone to prayer on an Eid day. It was morning and we had just finished with "Allahu Akbar" when he said that he thought that all of my call to prayer were all very beautiful but he wondered why my call that day had had such a special impact on him. I asked him in what way had it impacted differently and he replied that he thought it was very emotional and put it down to the fact that it was Eid which is always a time when you think of family. He said my voice had seemed particularly beautiful that morning and he had been profoundly moved.

I prayed for, and with, them, then delivered the Eid sermon. This seemed to make them much happier, more content and I reminded them that Allah was our helper and that we all had to be reconciled to Him and be guided by Him, because all our situations were controlled by Him. We could not forget our mistakes, we were facing our present difficulties because of errors we had made in the past and I read to them the verses where Allah says: "And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much"(Ash-Shura:30). Some cried and told me that when I spoke they felt a certain peace coming over them and were consoled. They remembered other Eids and the giving their children their Eid gifts and they remembered their friends and neighbours as memories of happier times flooded back to them. Thanks to Allah I was able to maintain my equilibrium at these times and my morale remained high. I understood the emotions that overwhelmed them, the longing for family, especially their children, and the contrast with their current situation was for many, very hard to bear.

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Q: Mamosta, what desserts did you have for Eid?

Ali Bapir: There was nothing special provided. We ate what we were given. Sometimes we tried to conjure up something by ourselves or with others. Sometimes some of the guards at their Eid festivals, not our Eids, such as Christmas, would bring desserts to us. The odd one during one of our Eids might bring us something he had. An Eid in prison is something different from an Eid on the outside. There is no Plav (rice) meat or dessert, no visits or communicating with loved ones, and sometimes even on these occasions we were not allowed to greet one another with an "Eid Mubarak!" (Happy Eid).

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TOPIC 7 HOW TIME WAS SPENT IN THE PRISON

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Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: The questions on this topic are quite specific and related to how you spent your time in prison. From what you have already said, it would seem that much of your waking time was spent in reading, writing and exercise. Before your arrest, you programmed your time very precisely. Is it the case that in prison you followed the same practices, despite the non-availability of your favourite books, newspapers, pens or paper? If so, how did you manage that?

Ali Bapir: In the name of God, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful, it is very hard when you are used to doing something but face circumstances which make it difficult to do what you were used to doing. It is very hard for anyone. It is true that I spent the majority of my time reading, thinking, writing and reciting the Quran. Prior to my arrest, whether I was in the mountains, in cities, or in caves, and no matter if it was winter or summer, I tried to ensure that I kept on writing, thinking and enquiring.

In the very early days, as I mentioned previously, I found it impossible to either think, read, or write. When I was put

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into solitary confinement, I found that there was a vacuum in my life, in my time. I did not have the Quran with me - in the beginning they did not give us a copy - but after a few days one of the inmates who was in a cell near to my own, Dr. Sattam Al-Qaud, brought me a copy of the holy Quran with an English translation. Having the Quran filled that void in my life, may Allah reward him, and after about 2 months the Americans distributed the Quran to all of us. For around 6 to 7 months they did not allow any opportunity for reading or writing, so consequently I kept busy with the Quran. On some days I read half of it and on others I finished it entirely in one day! Normally, I read less and finished the whole of the Quran in 3 to 4 days. In the early months, then, most of my time was taken up reading the Quran.

Q: During your 22 months in prison, including your time in solitary confinement, you clearly had a great deal of time on your hands. How many times do you think you read the Quran in its entirety?

Ali Bapir: On average, I finished reading the Quran completely every 2 to 4 days. I read the Quran as part of my prayers. So, I would say that during my time in prison I finished the whole Quran approximately 140 times. When we were finally allowed to read other books, the time I spent reading the Quran reduced and, again, as we were gradually allowed to do other things, I spent less time reading the Quran. Despite that change, there is no doubt that between readings for my obligatory and non-obligatory prayers, during my daily and nightly prayers, I read the whole of the Holy Book at least 100 times from memory and for the rest I read directly from the copy of the Quran that I had in my possession. There is something quite special and unique in reading

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the Quran as a prayer. The only way I can describe it is that it has its own taste. Personally, I enjoyed reading the Quran as a prayer immensely.

Q: Other than reading the Quran, were you able to worship in any other way? For example, how many days did you fast, if indeed you fasted at all?

Ali Bapir: In order to have a clear picture of how I spent my time in the prison, I need to explain things in order. Then I will come back to fasting and other topics. In the morning, when I got up, I did my exercises. This, of course, was after dawn (Fajr) prayer and recitations from the Quran. If I had had sufficient sleep during the night before the Fajr prayer I stayed awake and read one or two parts of the Quran. Sometimes I read 3 parts of the Quran at night prayers but on other occasions I read up to 7. This meant I stayed awake for between 3 and 4 hours. When I could not sleep again after the Fajr prayer I just relaxed.

After reading the Quran and doing my exercises in the morning, if I was not fasting, I ate my breakfast which consisted of whatever was available. Following breakfast, I read the Quran. Later, when permitted, I would read the Quran and write. I allocated sufficient time for my writing but always ensured that I had plenty of time to think about what I wanted to say. There is no worthwhile writing without thought.

In that period of time, before being given permission to write after my morning exercises and breakfast, I did further exercises in my cell. I read the Quran and remembered Allah every single day. I came to understand, even more clearly, that for every situation there is a specific supplication or prayer. I also, more than ever, understood that human souls

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require prayer, especially when recalling our sins. Human beings are always sinners and always need forgiveness. When you ask for Allah's forgiveness through Istighfar, this is the time to focus on the oneness of Allah. When you subordinate yourself to Allah through Tahlil, saying La ilaha illallah, you confirm your belief that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah. In times of great personal sadness, you perform the Hawqala, when you accept that nothing in your situation can be changed save as Allah ordains. Other acts of application include sending your greeting, or Salawat, to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the prayer remembrance of Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him) when he said: "There is no God except you, glory be to you I was one of the sinners".

On occasion I would repeat a particular prayer or verse from the Quran a 1000 times or more. While doing this I would often pace back and forth in my cell from one corner to another corner. At other times I remained sitting but when I was reading the Quran, or remembering Allah, I generally walked. I was always walking whenever I was reading books in order to avoid sitting.

The guards changed our exercise times. It was not our choice. Sometimes they took us outside at 9:00 AM and on the next occasion it would be at 7:00 PM in the evening. Each exercise period was always between half an hour and an hour. Sometimes they did not take us out at all during the day. Therefore, we were not able to plan any work or other activity for the exercise time because we never knew when it would be. These constant changes may have been related to their security concerns so as to prevent any division having the opportunity to make any arrangements between individuals. They regulated all parts of our day and this was basically the pattern of my daily life while in prison.

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During the night, after the sunset prayer, I sometimes extended my prayers by reading the Al-A'raf Surah or other Surahs that were shorter than the Al-A'raf. This Surah came from the authentic traditions of Al-Bukhary and tells us that once the Prophet finished the Surah of Al-A'raf during the Maghrib. I did the same thing and wondered how long it had taken. I calculated that it had taken me it takes 45 minutes and takes prayer time closer to the Isha. My assessment suggests that when some Mullahs used to say that the Surah of Al-Kauthar or the Surah of Al-Ikhlas must be recited during the sunset prayer they were incorrect, because the Prophet had read the Al-A'raf Surah in its entirety during the sunset prayer.

I often read whole sections or parts of the Quran during the sunset prayer. It all depended on how I was feeling psychologically. It seems to me the more you want something, desire it, the more you enjoy it. I found myself delving deeper and deeper into the Quran. As well as that, there were many times during the Isha prayer I read 1 or 2 excerpts from the Quran, particularly during the nights when I woke up late in the evening for the night prayer. I compensated by saying the Fajr and Isha prayers. I tried to get off to sleep after the Isha prayer in order to be awake for the night prayer or for Suhur, the pre-dawn meal.

As for night prayers, I was able to stay awake for anything between 1 and 4 hours and, on the odd occasion, up to 6 hours. This meant, of course, that I had little sleep, particularly during that time before I was allowed to write. Once I was able to write I became very tired during the day, I guess because I had to write on a piece of cardboard. I did not have a desk, of course, and my back was constantly bent which

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caused me considerable pain. In consequence, I needed more rest during the night than previously.

During the Fajr prayer, sometimes I read the Al-Baqara Surah or 3 excerpts from the end of the Quran, or even 3 parts from any part of the Quran, because I had two ways of finishing, or Khatma, my readings from the Quran. For one of them, I read one or more parts of the Quran, and in the other I finished my readings during the night, or other prayers. This gives you some sense of the details of my programme and other prayers.

Q: Can we now return to the issue of fasting?

Ali Bapir: I was not able to fast in the month as I was still recovering from the shock of my arrest and illness. After that first month, I was able to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. On some occasions I fasted for 10 days continuously, and at other times I would fast for up to 19 days. However, in the last 7 months before my release I fasted for the whole of the month. The total number of days of fasting while in prison, including Ramadan, amounted to over half of my imprisonment. I was imprisoned for 660 days, including the night I stayed in Baghdad. From the time of my arrest until the time of my release, I fasted more than half of the time I was incarcerated and, in addition, I observed 2 months of Ramadan. Making a pre-dawn meal, the Suhur, was very difficult in the beginning because there was no food. Sometimes the cell was so cold that the food was still frozen in the bags. We ate whatever we could get. Yes, in the beginning, preparing the Suhur was difficult but for the next Ramadan the guards prepared food for us, such as fried or boiled eggs, or they would provide a potato for each of us. After Ramadan, instead of our breakfast, they brought us food during Suhur. In

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fact, I believe that this was all parts of God's special arrangement for me, because I had decided and made it known that I would fast until the day of my release. One scholar said, "I will fast during this life and break my fast at the time of my death". Similarly, I said to my fellow prisoners that I would fast while imprisoned and break it when released. Up until my release I was brought a meal at Suhur which was very good for me. I ate my fresh and warm food then and in the evening they brought us our meals. My last days in the prison were good in terms of food and eating.

Q: When you were standing for night prayer, were you allowed to go to the washroom for your ablutions, or did you have water in your cell?

Ali Bapir: For the first 3 months, there was no water or opportunity to visit the washroom. I found that very hard. If you had to urinate, you had to do so into a bottle, and use a container to defecate. I ate very little as I found it very upsetting to defecate in my cell. I could do without that. I would go to the toilet once or twice a day. I lost a great deal of weight because I was not eating food much in order not to need to defecate. After that first 3 months I was transferred to a block that had toilets in the cells and so we washed and made our ablutions there.

Q: Mamosta Ali Bapir, you are known for not sleeping for too long due to your preoccupation with schedules and programs. How many hours a day did you actually sleep while in prison?

Ali Bapir: That varied. I did not pay much attention to sleep. My fellow prisoners often told me that I should sleep more but I was always too busy. I was particularly busy when

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I was writing, which was after 201 days of imprisonment. I stopped writing a week before I was released.

That means I spent 450 days in total writing my book. Not surprisingly then, I had little time for sleep! I think I slept on average 5 or 6 hours in any 24 hour period. Later, when I thought about it, I realized that just as it is not good to go too long missing meals, so, too, I felt missing out on sleep was potentially harmful and lead to you wanting or needing more than is healthy. When I could not sleep at night I made up for it during the day. It may be that on some days I had a total of 6 or 7 hours but I doubt if I ever exceeded 7 hours.

I feel sure that the body needs adequate sleep and should rest as much as is necessary to recover from any exertion. Relaxation plays a part in recovery but so too does adjusting to your situation and developing an appropriate pattern of sleep. If someone has been used to sleeping 8 hours every night and is reduced to only 7 then he invariably feels he has missed out. However, once he has adjusted to a new pattern of less sleep, then, those feelings of tiredness go. I also believe that the amount of sleep you need depends on your age. At my stage in life, or indeed anyone over 40, I think 6 and 1/2 hours is sufficient. To overcome tiredness, relaxation is more effective than extra hours of sleep.

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Q: We will not talk about worship too much, since it is such a personal matter, but would you say that your time in prison was one of special spirituality and, in terms of religious development, was a particularly important stage in your life? Or was your spiritual life in prison the same as that outside it?

Ali Bapir: My pattern of personal worship was very similar inside and outside prison. Those who were close to me or lived near me know that, as I have always been guided in my life choices by the Quran and the Sunna and tried to live my life based on the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions. I have read a believer, particularly one who follows Islam, lives a life of suffering and pain, and without strengthening the spiritual and moral aspects of his life he could not bear the burden placed on a true follower of Islam. That is why in a number of places in the Quran Almighty Allah orders the Prophet to undertake night prayer, to remember Allah, glorify Him, depend on Him, dedicate his life to Him, and not to be overly concerned about this temporal life. For example at the end of the Surah Ta.Ha, Almighty Allah says: "So be patient with what they say and exalt [Allah] with praise of your Lord before the rising sun and before its setting; and during periods of the night [exalt Him] and at the ends of the day, that you may be satisfied. And do not extend your eyes towards that by which We have given enjoyment to [some] categories of them, [its being but] the splendor of worldly life by which We test them. And the provision of your Lord is better and more enduring. And enjoin prayer upon your family [and people] and be steadfast therein. We ask you not for provision; We provide for you, and the [best] outcome if for [those of] righteousness"(Ta. Ha:130-132).

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At the end of the Surah Al-A'raf, Surah Al- Hijr and Surah An-Nahl, and many others there are similar injunctions. In the Surahs of Al-Muddaththir and Al Muzzammil, and indeed all of them, almighty Allah orders the Prophet (peace be upon him) to make an effort and to increase his personal spirituality, piety and nearness to Allah.

Even before prison, I always tried to put time aside for non-obligatory fasting, may God increase my capacity, and I have tried to fast on days other than Ramadan. I tried to have as many night prayers and non-obligatory prayers as I could, except during timers of illness or travel which are exceptions allowed by the Almighty, as it says in the Quran: "He has known that there will be among you those who are ill and others traveling throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah and others fighting for the cause of Allah"(Al-Muzzammil:20). These three situations, sickness, travelling to make a living, and to undertake Jihad or otherwise acting in Allah's cause, are all permitted exceptions to the injunctions to say the night prayer. I have been in those situations on occasion. Whenever I could, I sought seclusion or itikaf, which enabled me to refresh myself spiritually.

In fact, imprisonment was positive in terms of the opportunity it provided for seclusion and often provided the chance for really intensive periods of seclusion. I had felt a spiritual eagerness, a thirst if you will, to immerse myself in Allah's greatness. But I did not have the opportunity because of a necessary preoccupation with my work. Imprisonment was akin to compulsory seclusion for me. I think that much of my spiritual thirst had left me but, by the will of Allah, I believe I benefitted considerably from prison in that the experience strengthened my faith, my spiritual side, and in

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giving me the time to contemplate the greatness of Allah, His beautiful names, His high characteristics, and His wonderful creations.

One of the things I realized in prison as a result of thinking so much was that almighty Allah will see to even the smallest of people's needs. He is aware of everything and, to me, this is self-evident. He provides for the simplest of needs. Let me give you an example. We can go several months without being given any fruit. In the early days we were not given any fruit but then they began to provide some. The human body needs the vitamins contained in fruit and, of course, fruit is well liked by most people as well. When I saw an orange in one of the guard's hands, my heart skipped a little. I love oranges but didn't look at it but something in my heart wished that I could have it. The prison administration did not take into consideration that many of us were already very unhappy and most of us, especially those who held high rank in the Ba'athist regime, were used to a good standard of living. The guards ate fresh food, fruits, desserts and salad. Not surprisingly, many of the former Ba'athist officials were very envious and drooled over the food they could not have. On the day when I saw the guard with the orange I was fasting and after finishing my exercises I returned to my cell and slept for a little while, even though it was during the day. When I woke up I found a big orange had been placed on the wooden ledge of my cell window. I thought that oranges had been given out to everyone but I discovered later by asking around that no one else had been given one. I told them that someone had given me one. Obviously, Almighty Allah had softened the heart of one of these unbelievers! Possibly he sent one of his angels to leave the orange. Everything is possible for Almighty Allah.

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One of the outcomes from my contemplation and meditation was this understanding in the importance that Almighty Allah places on even the smallest needs of his people. I was very upset by having to wash in my cell. My blanket often became wet, particularly in the winter, and it was not until about the 90th day of my imprisonment that we finally had toilets in our cells. The day before that I prayed to Allah, telling him that I was finding impossible to keep myself as clean as I should, for example being unable to clean myself properly after a nocturnal emission, and asked that He find a way to have us moved to cells that had toilets. My neighbor, he was a smoker, and whenever he smoked, the smoke found its way into my cell which affected my breathing. I had a strong aversion to smoke having been a non-smoker all my life. I became very upset at smoke coming into my cell. Another problem was noise from other prisoners. Being in solitary confinement depresses everyone and one prisoner in particular was badly affected by being kept in isolation. His cell was near to mine and he shouted a great deal and tried to talk to me. He found isolation very hard to come to terms with. He even shouted to attract my attention while I was praying and I would say subhanallah, that is glory be to Allah. I told him that when he heard me say subhanallah he had to remember that I was either praying, reading Quran or meditating on the greatness of Allah and that his constant shouting interrupted my devotions. On one morning, I prayed that these problems would be resolved and on the afternoon of that day we were told that we were to be transferred. In fact, I was a little bit apprehensive and wondered if we were being moved to a place even worse than the one we were in. However, underneath I had hope and I said that, God willing, my prayer was being answered, and we would go to a better place. In the

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evening they took us to another division, where the cells had toilet facilities, smoke could not drift into my cell, and the issue of noise was gone. All three of my prayers were answered.

Q: Are you happy that we postpone discussion about the more unforgettable aspects of prison life for another time?

Ali Bapir: Do you intend to talk about them on another occasion?

Q: We would like to deal with them as a separate topic. Mamosta, you mentioned that while in prison you were able to incorporate the Surah Al-A'raf into the sunset, something that you had previously not done. From that question arises as to whether there were any other practices that you undertook in prison that you could only carry out because you were imprisoned?

Ali Bapir: Probably the one you cite was the first new practice, because I was continuously praying myself and I led the prisoners. We constantly had guests and gatherings so if I read the Surah Al-A'raf during sunset prayer the people who were praying behind me had to sleep until the Isha prayer! In fact, I do not believe that how I conducted myself, dealt with people, trying to help where I could, showing pity and working together with others, was anything different to what I had done before. The context was, of course, different but the practices, by and large, were not. There was nothing that I could only do in prison.

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Q: Mamosta, let us come back to reading and writing. It is obvious to anyone that you cannot live without books, reading and writing. In those early months of your imprisonment you had none of these things, so, at that time, how did you cope?

Ali Bapir: Without doubt it was very difficult in the beginning. I came from one difficult situation to another. The earliest ones were the most difficult

because I was in pain, suffered torture, and all in all it was much harder than when I was put into solitary confinement as, even without books and writing implements, it was like coming home. Solitary confinement at least freed me from pain and I was very happy about that. As the days turned into weeks and the weeks became months, for many this would have been a great trial, but for me Allah had made me such that I always needed to fill my time with something worthwhile. Allah gave me that capacity and without it I would have found it much more difficult. Exercise time was supposed to be about 2 and a half hours and the remainder of our time was spent in our cells. Sometimes that period outside was reduced as toilet time was included in the total. The guards counted down the time left to us in 10 minute sections but even then Almighty Allah made dealing with this time easier for, and even during exercise time, I tried not to be without something to do. I was always praying, contemplating or sending greetings, salawat, to the Prophet (peace be upon him). I did not really have any free time. If you have no free time, you have no time on your hands for sadness, unhappiness or worries. I thought a great deal. I enjoyed having a book with me but failing that, and in the absence of the opportunity to write, I created my own prayers as an alternative.

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Q: During those months when you had access to books and were able to write, how many books or other published material were you able to read? How did you come by them and what were their titles?

Ali Bapir: Believe me there were many titles, but mostly they were stories and novels that were written by European, Eastern, and Western novelists and story tellers that had been translated into Arabic. The books were mainly of that kind and, in addition, there were copies of the Torah and the Gospels, both of which I read. The Torah was around 2000 pages and the Gospels were around 1000 pages. Both included commentaries and I spent some time reading them. I spent 1 month reading those two. I probably read between 100 and 150 of the novels. The novels were generally classics; writers from India, Britain, France and America, as well as Russians, such as Tolstoy. There were a few Islamic books, such as Tuhfatudhakirin by Shawkani, and Riazussalihin by An-Nawawi, the History of Caliphs and People around the Prophet by Khalid Muhammad Khalid, and the History of Iraq, but after a time they removed all Islamic books. There were books by Dr. Ali Al-Wardi, The Preachers of the Sultans, and other such titles but by the end they had removed all of them, leaving only novels and story books written by Europeans translated into Arabic.

Q: In the previous topics you mentioned writing a book in Arabic. Can you tell us more about that? Did you have paper to write on? You talked about writing a book but you had no paper to begin with and had to write on cardboard instead. How did you get what you had written out of the prison?

Ali Bapir: In the early months I was not permitted to write. I was not allowed to have paper and pens. One day I was called for an interrogation. The American interrogators

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had been replaced by two British interrogators; one of them was called Mr. Bell and the other one Mr. Joe. These two were much friendlier towards me and told me that they believed I was a sincere and honest man. They said they wanted to open a new chapter in my relationship with my captors. They told me that they thought that the accusations against me were false and that they would not conduct any interrogations of me in future but would welcome the opportunity simply to discuss and debate issues of mutual interest. I replied that I would be happy to do that and they asked me if there was anything they could do for me. At that time I badly needed a wrist watch because for the previous 7 months I did not have any way of accurately telling the time, something I needed when I called Adhan, and particularly for knowing the correct time for Suhur. My cell was dark and I could not see outside and so it was very difficult to judge time. I asked that the watch that had been taken from me on my arrival to be returned, and for writing materials. I told them that I would be very grateful for the chance to write again as I had a great deal of spare time and had some thoughts, Khatira, on the Quran that I wanted to commit to paper. I also told them that I wanted to learn a little English. I was quite keen to learn English at that time but once I had learned a few phrases and sentences, I decided that my time was better spent studying the Quran.

Those two British interrogators gave me the opportunity to re-commence writing. I saw them write my requests in their notes. This was important because each set of interrogators relied on the notes of the last. The fact that they wrote down that I was entitled to pen and paper ensured that others respected this decision. Then they brought me a 100-page notebook and 2 pens. I was delighted. After that, I was given

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pens by some of the interrogators, but more often it was the guards who provided them. They appreciated that I was very busy with my writing. Now and then the guards would ask if I needed anything and if I did they bought the item from their own money. I will never forget this kindness. One of the guards, Joseph, an older man, between 50 and 60, told me that he felt compelled by God to help me and that he viewed me as a holy man. For that reason he would bring me pens and notebooks at his own expense. I asked him about himself and he told me that he had a wife and children. I said that I did not want him to spend money on me that he needed for them. He replied that he believed that if he helped me then God would reward him. It was in this way that Almighty Allah influenced some of them to help me by bringing pens, notebooks and paper. I used over 2000 sheets of paper writing this book, probably about 1000 of which was in rewriting and drafts. I threw them away initially but then thought better of that. On one occasion, I burned the drafts in my cell. The camp was a military compound so guards quickly became alarmed at the smell of smoke in an area full of military vehicles. They thought it must be the result of someone smoking but as I did not smoke they did not check my cell. At exercise I told some of the other prisoners that some of the draft pages contained the holy names of Allah and some verses from the Quran, and that I could not risk them being walked on if I threw them away. They were horrified at that thought. Some guards came with air freshener sprays to spray the cells to get rid of the smell of smoke. They did not spray my cell, saying that they knew I did not smoke, therefore any smoke smell could not emanate from me! I consulted my prisoner friends about what I should do about the drafts. They had no suggestions but an idea suddenly came to me. I

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believed that it was too dangerous to throw the drafts away, for the reason I have already told you, but I came up with the idea of soaking the pages in water and allowing them to disintegrate and become a doughy mush. In this way the writing disappeared and then it was safe for me to throw them away. As well as all the paper, I must have used at least 50 pens. If God had not softened the hearts of those guards to me it would have been very difficult for me to write[1].

Q: Mamosta, you said previously that after reading your book some of the Ba'ath officials in the prison realized the truth about Islam. Who were they and to what extent had your writings impacted their thinking?

Ali Bapir: First, I have to say a little about this book. The title of the book is Islam manifests in the book of Allah, and my intention in writing it was to talk about Islam in the light of the Quran. I believe that Almighty Allah has talked about all aspects of Islam in the Quran and if anyone studies it deeply, the answers to how to conduct yourself in all areas of life can be found.

My book was made of 4 chapters, and in a sense was 4 books in one.

The first chapter explained that Islam holds the true knowledge about the Creator and all His creatures. This epistemology talks about the theory of knowledge in Islam, how Islam views this universe and existence, how it views the Creator, how it views life and human beings, both in this life and the next, and is about 300 pages long.

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(1) Also, sometimes Dr. Sattam Al-Qaud would help me in finding pens and papers.

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The second chapter discusses what Islam is in terms of the belief in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers and the Day of Judgment. This part of the book was subdivided into 6 sections and articulates all the principles of belief. It was 900 pages long and was the largest chapter in the book.

The third chapter deals with Sharia and the commitment it places on the individual as a separate unit and as part of a collective group. It explores the relationship between the individual and Islam, and the relationship between society and Islam in all its aspects. In this chapter I discussed the Islamic state and Islamic entity.

The fourth chapter emphasizes how Islam provides a good guide for how people should be treated and regarded. This included looking at the issue of how Muslims should conduct themselves in relation to non-Muslims, whether in times of war or peace.

The book is composed of these 4 chapters. I can say each of those Ba'athists we are talking about read at least some of them. As for those prisoners who were with me, I concentrated on encouraging them to read the first 2 chapters which were more specifically on faith. I believe that those who read my work benefited from it. Whenever they read parts I noticed changes in them. They said things like it was the first time that they had realized that the Quran deals with all aspects of life and that all the answers were contained within its pages and the traditions and guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him). While I encouraged most of them to read the first 2 chapters, I gave the third and fourth chapters to a few, including Dr. Sattam Al-Qaud. He read a unit of Chapter 4 and asked my permission to use it as the basis for a Ph.D.

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dissertation. I said that as soon as he was released he had my permission. He suggested that he would ask about sources later and would acknowledge the influence of my book on his research. He was very complimentary about it and said that he had been looking for such a work for some time.

Q: Who read the book?

Ali Bapir: I cannot remember all their names accurately, my disciples are still there!

Q: It is clear that prison, for many Islamic writers, such as Sayyed Qutb, may Allah send mercy on him, was a very negative experience and this is reflected in their writing. Does that apply to you?

Ali Bapir: In the entire book, I only mention prison 2 or 3 times. In the introduction, I mentioned how I came to write this book and in what circumstances. In 1 or 2 other places I briefly refer to prison. In fact, it was due to Allah's grace that I did not feel that I was actually in prison. Sometimes I sat and meditated, read the Quran and contemplated Allah. Believe me, I thought about matters in the same way as if I was in the desert. I saw the situation as open ended, I had no idea when it would come to an end and that was particularly true when I was in solitary confinement, and at least there was no more torture, beatings or humiliation.

Yes, human beings become bored from time to time and that is especially true when a bracelet with your name and number on it is put around your wrists. Whenever I saw that, I became very upset because it brought home that I was in prison and a captive. In the inner places of my mind, however, I saw myself in a better, more moral place.

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Probably, when you read the book later you will not find any obvious effects of the prison, expressions of feelings of sadness or anything like that. As for those honourable people who wrote books about their experiences, it is possible that they were the victims of torture or were humiliated and harassed. For me, however, to write and talk about Islam you must have a sense of inner peace.

When I was taken to solitary confinement, other than the second interrogation stage during which I was harassed, there were no instances of intentional humiliation. Sometimes we had to collect cigarette ends or clean the bathroom and the washroom, but we did not feel that making us do those things was a deliberate attempt to humiliate us. They told us that since it was where we lived we should clean it up, but other than that there was no pushing, shoving or swearing at us which was common in other prisons. The Ba'athists told me that by comparison to the treatment meted out to prisoners in other facilities our prison was like a 5 Star Hotel. As far as the spiritual aspect goes, as far as I was concerned, I was only imprisoned in a physical sense, in my mind I was free and my spirit soared in the heavens.

Q: Mamosta, you have told us that you have read the Quran approximately 140 times. How many times have you read the Surah of Yusuf?

Ali Bapir: I read it when I was finishing the Quran, but not separately.

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Q: You did not read it separately?

Ali Bapir: No, I thought a great deal about it and read it very attentively. I thought very deeply about the life of Prophet Yusuf, particularly when I was dealing with those prisoners who were with me. I contemplated some verses in particular, including: "And there entered the prison with him two young men. One of them said, 'Indeed, I have seen myself [in a dream] pressing wine'. The other said, 'Indeed, I have seen myself carrying upon my head [some] bread, from which the birds were eating. Inform us of its interpretation; indeed, we see you to be of those who do good"(Yusuf:36).

I considered that this was a Prophet of Allah against whom vile and baseless accusations had been made. The two prisoners, one of them appeared to be bartender and the other was a non-believer king's cook, they recognized the goodness of Yusuf and naturally went to him to interpret their dreams. I thought that Yusuf (peace be upon him) was one of the righteous. He was famous in the prison because of how he dealt with others. Good deeds flow from good words, as Almighty Allah says: "And speak to people good [words]"(Al-Baqarah:83). He goes on to say: "And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good"(Al-Baqarah:195). I came to the conclusion that the best thing any prisoner can do is to show kindness to his fellow prisoners. All prisoners need kindness, support from others, a cheery face, a friendly greeting.

An excerpt from the Quran, again from a prison, encouraged me to model myself on Yusuf (peace be upon him) in dealing with those prisoners around me, even if they were not Muslim. The two prisoners with Yusuf in prison worked for a non-believer and when he interpreted their dreams for them, he said: "O [my] two companions of prison, Are sep-

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arate lords better or Allah, the One, prevailing? You worship not besides Him except [mere] names you have named them, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know"(Yusuf: 39-40). Yusuf calls for them to acknowledge that Allah alone is God. His injunctions show that the two prisoners were polytheist. After that he tells them about their dreams and he says: "O two companions of prison, as for one of you, he will give drink to his master of wine; but as for the other, he will be crucified, and the birds will eat from his head. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquire"(Yusuf: 41). I did not think of myself as better than Yusuf, therefore, just as he had dealt with the two prisoners he found himself with, so I felt I too had to be kind and considerate to my fellow inmates irrespective of whether they were Muslim or not. Yusuf's attitude paved the way for him to play a greater role in running that country, even though its political leadership had wrongfully imprisoned him. To conclude, then, I did not read the Surah of Yusuf separately. In any case, I probably read the Surah Al-Kahf more than Yusuf's as I tried to read it every Friday morning in addition to completing the Quran.

Q: Would it be true to say that while outside prison you understood elements of Yusuf's Surah, but those that were hidden from you became clearer in prison?

Ali Bapir: I would say that not only of the Surah Yusuf, but about many parts of the Quran. I believe that many of the spiritual blessings I received in prison came from Almighty Allah, stemmed from His revelation of many secrets contained in the Quran. I know that so many of these new

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insights did not come from other books or commentaries on the Quran or explanations of the Surahs, but from my internal contemplation guided by Almighty Allah.

Q: In those two years in prison, did you ever miss your prayers?

Ali Bapir: No, even during the time my hands were tied when they took us from Mosul, even then I still said my prayers, Witr. I called on Allah to witness that despite my predicament I would continue to pray. I did not know then whether I would be released quickly, or indeed at all, but I saw my situation as a trial that I had to meet with strength and faith. I said my prayers properly, but when I was very tired and uncomfortable I prayed while sitting because I simply was not physically able to pray standing. At those times I was unable to say non-compulsory prayers, because it often happened that while praying one of the guards would come and slam or push me against a wall making it impossible for me to pray. I was always eager to finish my compulsory prayers as soon as possible before they had the chance to come and interrupt me. Once that phase was over I tried to say both compulsory and non-compulsory prayers as regularly as I could, knowing that the more I prayed the more I was empowering my spiritual side.

Q: You said that the guards brought your breakfast predawn. Why did they do that? Did you ask them to or did they make the change to the breakfast time on their own initiative?

Ali Bapir: They changed the timings, having realized that breakfast had to be distributed before dawn during Ramadan, and after that they simply continued. I determined to fast every day after Ramadan until I was released. I believed

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that Allah had arranged matters so that all my Suhur meals were prepared for me on time. I benefitted from that change because prior to it I had difficulty through having to fast without having Suhur. The food we were given at sunset to break our fast was insufficient if I had had nothing before dawn. That period was very hard.

Q: Mamosta, is there any particular verse that made you cry more than any other?

Ali Bapir: I cannot really pick out one.

Q: Is there any particular verse in the Quran that you find yourself stopping at more than others?

Ali Bapir: Again, I do not think I could identify any one verse that I read more than others but the one that has had the greatest impact on me and affected me from my earliest life, and in prison, was the Surah Al-Fatihah. It affected me so much. On one occasion when I was reading the Surah Al-Anbiya', one of the verses made me stop and ponder its deeper meaning. There was another verse from that Surah that had the same effect on me and I found something new in it every time I read it. These insights were the result of the inner state that I had nurtured at that particular point in time. It happened often that one of the verses made me stop and contemplate its meaning further.

Q: Was there any verse that you repeated more than others?

Ali Bapir: I repeated this verse more than any others. I constantly repeated this verse sometimes as many as a 1000 times in a day! Other verses I repeated often included this verse in Surah Al-Anbia': "There is no deity except You; exalted are you. Indeed I have been of the wrongdoers"(Al-An-

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bia':87) and this: "Sufficient for us is Allah, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs"(Al-Imran: 173). However, the Surah Al-Fatiha affected me more than any others. I wrote my first book based on the Surah Al-Fatiha and on the Surah Al-Fatiha. Each of the 4 chapters were written with the verses of Surah Al-Fatiha in mind and their explanations were based on my insight into the entire Quran.

Q: Are there references in your book from sources other than the Quran?

Ali Bapir: Initially, only the Quran and afterwards, when I had access to them, Sahih Al-Bukhary, Sahih Al-Muslim, and some other traditions which I had remembered.

Q: Did the scarcity of resources ever become a major hindrance to you?

Ali Bapir: I don't think so, whatever I needed I found in the Quran (glory be to Allah). Anything I wanted, any proof I needed, I found in the Quran. Any aspect of Islam which I wanted to clarify, I found in the Quran, as you will see later.

Q: Did any excerpt or story in the Quran remind you of your story or that of the Islamic Group?

Ali Bapir: I think what happened to me was similar to what happened to most Prophets (Peace be upon them), particularly what happened to the Prophet Musa, or Moses as he is known in the West, (Peace be upon him), when he was being brought up in the house of the Pharaoh. For me, being kept in an American prison was like the experience Moses had being brought up in the Pharaoh's palace.

Just as Moses was brought up and matured in the Pharaoh's palace, I matured in an American prison. My understanding

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of faith and spirituality was deepened further through the Quran and the Sunna while in this prison.

Q: You talked about the novels of famous authors and poets that you read in prison. I would like to ask you your views on those stories. Can a Muslim author write a novel or a story of that sort? If so, how could it be done?

Ali Bapir: Yes, this point requires a great deal of discussion. I read one of Tolstoy's most famous works, Anna Karenina. I believe that it has been translated into Kurdish, have you read it? This is one of his most creative works and it is very well known. Tolstoy was a Christian and called on women to rebel against their husbands and have lovers and even force the husband to give up their wives to their lovers. To me this promoted adultery and infidelity in marriage. I was surprised, therefore, that so many prisoners encouraged me to read it saying that it contained some very humorous parts. When I had read it, I told them that the book's entire philosophy, its very essence, was about a woman loving a man other than her husband. The husband had married her because he loved her but she switched her love to a man she found more handsome, more physically attractive. The story is about how the wife and her lover set about persuading the husband to give his wife up so that she would not die of a broken heart. That was the nub, the theme, if you like, of the book. I discovered many of the novels I read glorified low standards of morality. After that I concluded that "whatever pours from the jar reflects the jar itself". In my opinion, these books provided fertile ground for people to justify their indulgence in low levels of morality. I felt that European and Western novelists did not encourage high standards of morality. One or two defended the rights of the oppressed and demonstrated

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an adherence to a set of values. William Shakespeare is an example of one such writer. In general, however, I found the majority of what I read promoted, or condoned, adultery and a low standard of morality. They seemed to accept that such standards were both the norm and acceptable and provided justifications for them.

Q: Have you read the book The Preachers of the Sultans, written by Dr. Ali Wardi? This book has been translated once or twice into Kurdish. If possible, could you sum up in a few sentences your opinion of this book?

Ali Bapir: Ali Wardi was a sociologist. I think he has an accurate and good understanding of psychology, but unfortunately he does not understand Islam properly. He is a Shi'ite, although I did not detect any Shi'ism in his writing. He seemed to me to be more concerned about attacking Shi'ites. In his book, The Preachers of Sultans, he vigorously defends the stand of Omer Bin Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) and clearly regarded him as a genius, a just and a good Caliph, while he criticizes Imam Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) in some places, which I found unfair. What I mean here is that you do not find Shi'ism in this book, and there is no evidence of any deep understanding of Islam, though in matters relating to sociology and psychology he was undoubtedly an expert.

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TOPIC 8 UNFORGETABLE ASPECTS OF PRISON

10/07/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: We now move on to another topic, which is the unforgettable events and aspects of prison life, particularly the faith and spirituality displayed by your friends while incarcerated. In your responses to our questions you referred to some of the kindness and empathy shown to you, particularly during the periods of torture which were, of course, very difficult times for you. Can you elaborate further on the help you received and how you felt about that support, and can you be specific about the timing of any support?

Ali Bapir: I am not really comfortable about going into too much detail as some of that support was very personal and too private to reveal openly. I can talk about instances that did not fall into that category.

The first point I would make is that during those times I actually felt a sense of serenity and calmness, even when I was feeling very miserable and thought that I might die, or even thought death might be preferable to what I was experiencing. Internally, however, despite my physically poor state,

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I maintained my psychological strength, stayed calm, and put my ability to do this down to God's great mercy and bounty.

The second matter I want to be clear about is that during that period of torture Almighty God helped me. I read the Quran and contemplated my lord, my heart beat with Him. I still remember that I read 6 parts of the Quran, from the beginning until the end of Surah Al-Ma'ida, while undergoing torture. Even now, the best way I can express it is that I still feel the taste of those verses beneath my tongue that I recalled in my mind during that awful time. One of those verses was: "Or do you think you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said, 'When is the help of Allah?' Unquestionably, the Help of Allah is near"(Al-Baqarah:214). When I recalled this verse, even in the situation in which I found myself, I had a sensation of a wonderful taste in my mouth. Many verses went through my head at that time, another was one in which Almighty God says: "You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves. And you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you (Jews and Christians) and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse"(Al-Imran:186). During my torture, the guards swore at me but I recalled this verse, particularly the parts where Allah warns: "And you will surely hear from those who were given the Scripture before you (Jews and Christians) and from those who associate others with Allah much abuse. But if you are patient and fear Allah – indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination"(Al-Imran:186) I asked Allah to give me determination and patience. Those verses seemed so relevant to my situa-

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tion at a time when I was suffering physically and that could have affected my morale so drastically.

One of the other bounties and blessings that Almighty God bestowed on me were the two occasions that I felt complete serenity and a spiritual state, which I had never experienced before in my life. I really cannot express it. I had never felt that way before. I was in a very bad situation and I felt as if, at a time when I was feeling incredibly hot, someone poured a jar of ice cold water over me. It took away all my pain, fatigue and sadness. The first time it happened it felt very strange. I thanked God for His bounty and felt very content and relaxed in my body. On the second occasion, I was very depressed and asked Allah for oblivion or to take my soul to Him. I felt thoroughly miserable. The guards made me stand up every time I fell over and I was in a terrible state. I lost hope and I closed my eyes, expecting to faint and collapse. I had never fainted in my life but at that time I welcomed the prospect of fainting as a way of avoiding the pain I was suffering. Human beings can only stand so much.

I closed my eyes and told myself that I was fainting. I started to fall and the guards pulled me up by my beard. They made me stand up and pulled me straight by my eyebrows and my ears. I found that particular humiliation very hard to bear. They seemed determined to make me suffer. I was distraught and closed my eyes again, still hoping to faint, when suddenly a feeling of serenity descended on me as if something had come down from the sky and entered my body, my spirit and my mind. I forgot all my pains, I was renewed, my heart rejoiced and my body relaxed. This has only happened to me twice in my life.

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Once, I was so uncomfortable, I prayed for relief. In a dream, two angels came and had a discussion with one another. Listening to them was as if someone had doused me with a bucket of light. I was thoroughly depressed but they led me to a verse from the Quran which made things so clear to me: "Certainly has Allah showed to His Messenger the vision in truth. You will surely enter al--Masjid ¬al¬-Haram, if Allah wills, in safety, with your heads shaved and [hair] shortened, not fearing [anyone]. He knew what you did not know and has arranged before that a conquest near [at hand]"(Al-Fath:27). I had a dream too, and I become inquisitive about it. I did not see the angels, but I saw their phantoms. I knew they were angels from the light they poured on me, and then I woke up reciting this verse. I believed that what I saw in my dream would come to pass and, indeed, it did.

I saw my family in my dreams, or some of my fellow prisoners that did not pray. I saw and remembered the next morning those who did not pray. I also saw storms up to 2 days before they arrived and I was given warnings of the trials that had still to come. A whole range of things that did happen were revealed to me in advance. I want to point this out as I think it is especially important.

Q: Do you believe that your prayers in prison were generally answered?

Ali Bapir: Yes, I devoted much of my time to praying and asking for support, especially in the early months of my imprisonment. I think that in the beginning of such times you concentrate on asking for help for yourself. You convince yourself that you must be the greatest of sinners to warrant such punishment. Then you begin to ask for Allah to intercede on behalf of your mother, your father, then your own

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immediate family and friends and, in due course, for your colleagues in the Islamic Group, in particular the leaders. I worried about the Group and expressed my concerns to Allah in prayer, telling Him that I was concerned that as I was not there with them they might lack guidance. I asked Allah to provide the necessary guidance to support one another and maintain harmony between all the elements of the Group. I also prayed that Allah would soften the hearts of others so that they might help the Group. I prayed hard that Allah would protect them from mistakes and help them avoid sin and evil. I prayed particularly for all Islamists in Kurdistan, followed by all Muslims in Kurdistan in general, then for Muslims in Iraq and then I extended my prayers to include all Islamists and to all Muslims. I did not feel this was a conscious choice. Allah was putting something into my heart which made my prayers evolve in this way. From things I was told, I came to believe that, over time, my prayers had been answered.

Q: Can you tell of us of any specific incidents, good or bad, involving the Americans or Ba'athist leaders and yourself?

Ali Bapir: The Americans punished me 3 times, which I found very harsh. Once, it was for greeting a group of prisoners with a "salaam". A guard punished me for that by sending me back to my cell. I tried to argue that his colleague permitted us to greet other prisoners and did not see it as an offence but he would have none of it and insisted I go inside. I lost my half an hour outside for that, it was very hard on me.

On another occasion, a guard told me when I was visiting the toilet that I could wash my hands but not my face. I told them that I was praying and needed to wash. He replied that he was not allowing us to wash our faces and anyone who did

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so would be deprived of his exercise time. I dug in and washed myself properly and for that, too, I lost my exercise time.

On the third occasion, I was exercising, running, racing with my friends, and I told my colleagues that we should exercise as fully as we could, but I crossed one of the sidewalks and a guard immediately told me I had to go back inside. He asked me why I was exercising so hard. He thought I was showing off. I told him it was nothing to do with that, I simply wanted to run as fast as I could and I did not think that was against the rules. He would not listen and, again, I was sent back to my cell. I went inside as instructed but told him that I did not care about how he treated me. I sat on a chair and began reading the Quran. I had opened my cell door and he shouted at me that I had to close the door and when I did not, he closed it and for good measure closed my window as well. The cell was now dark so that I could not read but I carried on reading the Quran from memory.

Those 3 instances were individual guards ignoring their own rules and were examples of purely personal, nasty, conduct reflecting the mood of the guard at the time. Some prisoners believed that these spiteful guards were Jewish but I have no knowledge as to whether that was true or not. On another occasion, one of my American interrogators, who spoke a little Arabic, constantly called me a liar over and over. I became very upset as he seemed capable only of insulting me in the vilest ways he could. I told him that I had never been called a liar by anyone before and he mocked me and questioned whether that was really true. I said he should ask others and I suggested a few people who were American allies that he could ask about me and who would confirm that I had never in all my life in Kurdistan been called a liar. I

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said that, in fact, I was paying the price for refusing to lie and that I did not know how to do anything other than speak the truth. He seemed to be a little puzzled by my claim that if he disrespected me, or hurt me, he was disrespecting and hurting himself. He told me that I had a big mouth and I tried to joke with him, telling him that the great man has great words. He then agreed that no one had ever told him that I told lies. This was after he had been calling me a liar repeatedly. It put considerable psychological pressure on me.

On the first day that I confronted the Ba'athists, they all claimed to be of the same opinion about matters. I told them that I considered them all to be polytheists which obviously touched a raw nerve amongst them. They said that if it was not for the fact that they held me in such esteem they would not accept such remarks from me. I replied that it did not matter to me whether they accepted what I had to say or not but if they were not prepared to listen, I was not prepared to sit with them and clarify matters for them. I was quite upset that they all were of one view, which was that I was not respecting their opinions and claiming that they worshipped idols. They insisted that they were true Muslims and that Islam had been brought to Iraq by Arabs. I agreed that this was the case but told them that it was the Ba'athist Arabs who had first turned their faces against the true religion. We had a very heated argument and in the ensuing quarrel some very harsh words were exchanged. I told them bluntly that their idea that just because they spoke a little Arabic gave them some sort of insight into Islam was nonsense. In the end, they asked me to forgive them but argued that I had attacked them, although they understood it was out of a sincere belief in what I was telling them. They said that I had no need to be alone but I countered that I was not alone as Allah and his

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angels were always with me. I offered to advise them if they were willing to listen but said that if they could not accept that they had something to learn there was little point. They wanted me to discuss and debate with them but asked me not to think of them as Arabs. They seemed genuinely eager to learn from me but wanted me to show them a little kindness. Their basic point was that many of the things I was telling them, they were hearing for the first time, and they needed time to absorb and understand what I meant. They gave the example of my description of them as idol worshippers as one such concept that they found difficult to internalize, as was the idea that Ba'athism was a religion. My clarifications and explanations coming, as it seemed to them, all at once, were too much for them. I told them that they were wrong in thinking I saw them all as Arabs and said that the issue of Arab or Kurd was irrelevant in this context and that I had not given them too much information. In fact, the reverse was true. They still had much to learn. I said that it was their treatment of both Kurds and Iraqis that had ultimately brought them to the situation in which they now found themselves but that they were still unable to express any regret over what they had done. I told them in no uncertain terms that their only hope lay in a rejection of their Ba'athism and a return to the true path of Islam. I told them that I pitied them. It was a harrowing debate and by the time I returned to my cell I was exhausted and emotionally wrung out.

Q: Were there any good times or incidents?

Ali Bapir: The good times were when I sat with the American and British interrogators after they had finished asking me their questions. We discussed a variety of issues relating to Islam. They commented that they had no concerns at all

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about my brand of Islam and wished that all Islamists shared my views. I was quite pleased by that and even more pleased when some of them said that they regretted not having a better understanding of Arabic so that they could learn more about the beautiful aspects of Islam that I had brought to their attention. Those were very good moments.

As for the heads of the previous Ba'athist regime, I really liked the fact that I had come amongst them. When I was released many of them cried and they obviously had mixed feelings about me leaving. Some openly, while being happy at my release, said that they would miss me and felt sad that I was leaving them behind. I was very happy that I had managed to influence a number of them to the extent that they asked me to stand witness for them on the Day of Judgment and that they had accepted a true version of Islam. Those, too, were very good moments for me.

Q: To what extent did the histories or biographies of previous Muslim scholars, particularly those who had themselves been imprisoned and tortured, from the distant past until recent times, have an impact on you?

Ali Bapir: I certainly thought of many of them, particularly Yusuf (peace be upon him). I believe he was the only prophet who was imprisoned so that might be why I thought of him so often. I also thought a great deal about the lives of great men, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, who spent most of his life in prison, Mamosta Saied Nursi, Abul-A'la Al-Maududi, Sayyed Qutb (may Allah have mercy on them), and many other prominent scholars that had written their most famous and important books while in prison and who had often undergone great personal transformation while being imprisoned. I thought of them and their lives often.

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TOPIC 9

10/07/2005
Hawler Komal Television Studio

Q: Mamosta, one year before your release there were a number of reports suggesting that your release was imminent and US officials confirmed that they had no evidence against you. Can you think of any reason why your release was delayed?

Ali Bapir: In the name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful, 6-7 months after my arrest, having finished their interrogations, the Americans came to me, apologised for my imprisonment, and confirmed that they had no evidence against me. I asked them if that was the case, why I was still being held? Their reply was that it was in the hands of their superiors. I said that if their superiors knew of some reason that I should continue to be held then, surely, they must have some idea of what that was? They replied that the reason was related to what was considered to be in the best interests of the United States and that while they had nothing specific in terms of charges against me, national security considerations meant that they felt that it was better to keep me imprisoned.

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It would seem that the Americans feared me, for whatever reason, and believed that if I was kept a prisoner, their concerns, or part of their concerns, about me would be eliminated. I do not think there was any reason other than that.

Q: We would like you to talk a little bit about how you came to learn that you were to be released, although you have covered some of this in your previous answers to other questions. Can you recall what happened?

Ali Bapir: The day before my release or the day itself?

Q: Both.

Ali Bapir: I have said before that when I talk about this matter I use the words "release" or "discharge", never "freedom" because, to my mind, freedom is the antithesis of slavery and I never, at any time, regarded myself as a slave. I may have been helpless, I was certainly a prisoner, but I was always free and always regarded myself as such.

On Wednesday 27 April, 2005, the director of the prison storage came and spoke to me in English. I understood him when he told me that I had to leave and that I had to gather up my belongings. I had a number of items in the prison store which were returned to me but I did not fully understand what was happening or where I was going to be taken to. I asked him if one of the prisoners who spoke better English could be brought to translate for me so that I could find out what was happening. He agreed and my fellow prisoner came and told me that I was being taken somewhere but he did not know where. He then let me know that the Americans had told him that I was to be released and would be allowed to return home. He was very happy for me but I

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did not react to the news and he asked me what was wrong and why I was not showing my elation at the news. I did not show my happiness because I did not regard the news as that important. Perhaps if I had received this news at other times during my imprisonment, I would have been far more pleased but, at that particular point in time, I just did not see it as anything to get excited about. I asked for my Kurdish clothes but I was told that they did not have them. I insisted that they did but they wanted me to wear Arab clothes but I said quite forcibly that I was Kurdish and did not wear the Arabic Dishdasha. He relented and went to look for my own clothes, which he found and brought to me. I asked him what time I would be leaving and he told me that it would be at about 1.30pm. At 1:30pm I was called to the Prison Administration Office and some of the people working there told me that they were delighted that I was being released and that I would soon be home. I thanked them. Other prisoners called out to me and asked why I was wearing Kurdish clothes. They were aware that my clothes had been put in storage. When you wore your own clothes they normally stamped "CI" on them and to avoid that I had let them put them in storage. I told the other prisoners that I was being taken somewhere else, though I did not know if what I was being told about my release was true or not. In due course, at the Administration Office, some papers were put in front of me that I was told to read and sign. They said that once I had signed, I would be released immediately. I read the document and found that it contained a number of conditions and was clearly written for someone who was a Ba'athist. For example, it said that I must renounce Ba'athism and agree never again to become Ba'athist. The document also contained clauses that I must cooperate and do a number of specific things requested by

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the Americans. I quietly pushed the papers back to him on the desk and told him to take them away. The administrator said that I had to sign them but I refused. He then asked me why I was refusing and I told them that it was because the document contained conditions that I could not accept. I told him bluntly that I had expected an apology, not the imposition of unacceptable conditions and that I would not sign. He told me that if I did not sign I would have to go back to my cell. I said that I would do so and put back on the 'game suit', which was the orange uniform similar to those worn by prisoners in Guantanamo. He was very surprised, and asked me how long I had been imprisoned. I told him that I had arrived about 22 months previously. He asked me whether I had been in solitary confinement and I confirmed that I had. He again seemed surprised and asked me if I was not bored. I said that, indeed, I was but I saw the shame of signing his document as being considerably worse than any boredom I might have to endure.

After our discussion he spoke with his superiors and when he returned he told me that he thought my stance was extremely noble and that if it was up to him, he would not insist that I sign the document but would set me free without conditions. However, he said that it was his General's decision to make, not his, and so he could not release me. He called his immediate superior, a colonel, and he too asked me why I would not sign the document. I gave him my reasons. Then he said that he would discuss the matter with his General. I said to him that just as he could not do anything without the say so of his higher authority, in his case his General, neither could I do anything without the permission of my higher authority, God. He asked me if God would be unhappy if I signed the document and I replied that he would because

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it would be against the tenets of my faith. I explained that I had never been a Ba'athist so could not sign to agree never to return to something I had never been a part of. Neither, I went on, could I agree to co-operate with the Americans. I repeated my belief that I was entitled to an apology rather than being asked to sign a document that had so many unacceptable aspects to it.

I remained there for a couple of hours, then they transferred me. Calls went back and forth between the Americans and Pusho Ibrahim Dizayee, the Deputy of Justice Minister. After that, one or two of our brothers called, including Kak Najat Surchi who called from Suleimani. Kak Pushu said to me that I should sign the document as it was only a formality and meant nothing, especially as I was being forced into signing. I agreed that I was being coerced and that if I did sign nothing could be read into that document either from a legal standpoint, or any other standpoint, and certainly not under Sharia law but I told him that I still felt ashamed at the very thought of it and wanted to find a compromise of some kind to resolve the issue.

Then they took me somewhere, I assume to put me under psychological pressure. They claimed they did not want me to go back to where I had been previously so I was kept in very uncomfortable conditions, with no opportunity to exercise, for 24 hours. The next day they said that I had to come up with something that they could negotiate with and I responded by telling them that the only document that I was prepared to sign was one indicating that I promised to serve my people and my country, the country of Iraq, and the Muslim people of Iraq within the framework of Islamic Sharia law. I wrote something to that effect down and added

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that I respected anyone who respected my people and served their interests. They started negotiations with me on that basis and, after some agreed amendments and further clarifications and explanations of my stance, I agreed to sign but made it clear that I would do so only on the basis that nothing to which I was agreeing would contravene Islamic law. I emphasized very forcibly that any agreement could not be interpreted as contradicting those fundamental laws of Islam. The administrator was somewhat exasperated and asked me why I was being difficult and said that I was putting obstacles in the way of my release yet again. I was adamant that the terms of my release could not be published or represented in a way that would impinge on my integrity. The administrator thought that I was being overly sensitive and wanted to know why I was behaving as I was. I replied that I was determined to safeguard both my reputation and my beliefs and if the document did not reflect those concerns I would not sign anything. They clearly had further discussions between themselves and came back to me saying they would comply with my wishes in the matter of the contents and the release document.

We gathered our belongings and a convoy of tanks and armored vehicles accompanied us to Baghdad to go in front of the Council of Ministers. Kak Pushu was there to receive us. We said our farewells to the prison officials and, before finally parting, the colonel said that he felt honoured to have known me and admired the strength of character I had exhibited while imprisoned. He wanted to say one more thing to me before we separated, which was that he hoped that when I returned to my home and family he would hear about the many good things I would do for my people. I thanked him most sincerely for his good wishes and said that I, too,

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had one last thing I would like to say to him and he asked me what that was. I told him that I was committed to doing as much good as I could and hoped that, as time went by, I would be an even more successful force for good. I believe that the proof that I kept to that commitment lies in what I subsequently did for my Kurdish Muslim people, both the masses and the political leadership, and in the contributions I made to the Kurdish intellectual community. So many helped and supported me in my time of trial, as evidenced by the rallies and petitions organized to secure my release, as well as the articles defending me that were written by supporters from all walks of life. I could do no other than respond to that support by continuing to work in their interests, to the best of my ability.

Q: What do you think were the reasons behind your release? Was it an acceptance that you were innocent or were other factors involved?

Ali Bapir: I believe there were a number of factors involved. As I said previously, the first of these factors was my unblemished record. The accusations levelled against me were totally without foundation, and even my jailers admitted that they had no proof of any wrongdoing on my behalf. I replied to the last letter to me in which they set out the accusations against me, and in which they said were the reasons behind my imprisonment, by stating categorically my refutations of all the accusations and telling them that I intended to publish both their letter and my reply. After that letter they quietly dropped the accusations against me, but did not release me.

The possibility that I was telling the truth about the true nature of the Islamic Group began to sink in. They seemed to realize that the Islamic Group is not some sinister organ-

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ization that one peers in at with trepidation from behind a curtain but rather was a group that believes in living together with others in peace, and believes that as the Prophets (peace be upon them) of Allah did before them, does its political work through Dawa, calling them to follow Allah, and through educating people.

The manifestation of mass support for my release could be seen in the rallies, the collection of votes, signatures on petitions, and the variety of people calling for my release, including scholars, Imams, tribal leaders, educated professionals, writers, intellectuals, the youth and elders, from all walks of life.

The participation of the Islamic Group in elections and the number of votes it attracted, which came as a surprise to some, all played a role in changing the attitude towards my incarceration.

A further factor was the attempts made by some prominent persons, particularly in the Kurdish leadership, such as Mam Jalal and Kak Masud and others, including Dr Mushin Abdulhamid and Mamosta Salahaddin Bahaddin[1]. Tribal leaders also lent their support, and to all of them who worked on my behalf and worked so tirelessly to secure my release, I owe an enormous debt. I am glad that I now, at last, have the opportunity to record my heartfelt thanks to all of them.

I believe all of these people from so many different backgrounds played a part in securing my release.

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(1) Salahaddin Muhammad Baha›addin: born in 1950. In 1965 he joined the Muslim Brotherhood. On 6/2/1994 it was declared his party (IUK) and he became the Secretary General.

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Q: Mamosta, prior to your arrest, your position on the US, as an administration, a powerful state, and as an occupier, was very clear, particularly in the early stages of the war when they first arrived in Iraq. What was your opinion of the US on your release, and now? In particular, what is your view of the continued American presence in Iraq?

Ali Bapir: My position remains the same because the US has not changed. I have maintained my view, and in prison I became convinced that the US did not care about democracy, human rights or international accords. I formed that opinion, for example, from talking to friends, both male and female, who worked for the Red Cross. Myself and other prisoners asked them many questions about US attitudes to agreements but they always replied that the US interpreted international agreements in one way, and they interpreted them in another. I told them that surely their interpretation had to carry more weight since they were the authors of many of these agreements. They agreed that this should have been the case but the fact remained that the Americans had the final say. I suggested that this was because the Americans were in a strong position and they were in a weak one. They did not even dare to admit that.

It seemed to me that when the US interests were threatened, it did not care about democracy or any of their other slogans about liberty and the rule of law. I felt that US rhetoric on these issues was in no way matched by their actions in reality.

After a time the US dropped the pretense and acted quite openly as an occupying power. It did hide that fact but justified its actions on the grounds that it had the right to, in effect, become the world's policeman and impose its values. I

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came to realise that it did not matter what the US claimed it stood for, it would do whatever it wanted to if it felt it was in their interests to do so, even if that involved acting in a way that was totally against its stated principles.

Q: What is your opinion of the attacks against the US forces in Iraq?

Ali Bapir: With regard to US forces occupying Iraq, and other countries, I have no doubt that any Muslim who respects his religion and truly abides by the Quran and Sunna will be uneasy. Almighty Allah says: "and never will Allah give the disbelievers a way [to overcome them]"(An-Nisa':141). God does not permit non-believers to have authority over Muslims. In a situation where you do not have power, but rather another has power over you, you must at least take the position of refusing to accept the exercise of power over you. When you do not have the power to alter the situation, this becomes very difficult.

With regard to America in control of Iraq, it seems clear to me that this cannot be accepted. Resistance in these circumstances is legitimate but we have to consider the extent to which resistance to American forces is beneficial and to what extent it causes harm. Our dealings and conduct has to be dictated by an analysis of advantages and disadvantages. Islamic scholars have indicated that in repelling an attacker the minimum force necessary should be employed. For example, if the person who attacks your home can be repelled simply by shouting at him then there is no need to throw a stone, if wounding him in the leg achieves the objective, there is no need to kill him. In other words, if the less violent tactics fail then the pressure should be increased gradually until success is achieved. In the context of Iraq, we have to try dialogue,

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political, public and media pressure. We must adopt a gradual, step by step approach, and at each step weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of any proposed action.

On the other hand, if any Islamic faction declares that its aim is the expulsion of the Americans, then its leadership should make itself known to the public and it should openly declare its programme and strategy for what would be put in place if, or when, they succeeded in removing the Americans, along with publishing a clear explanation of why they believe the expulsion to be justified. The public have the right to know the agenda of those who advocate the ejection of the Americans and be re-assured that there would be no power vacuum that could be exploited by others. Only then could the people support any such policy. Military activity must always serve political ends, not the other way round. Islam does not call for jihad, or indeed any violence, for its own sake but only as a means to an honourable end. Almighty Allah says: "Fight them until there is no [more] fitnah (disbelief) and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah"(Al-Baqarah:193). The injunction is clear. Muslims should fight until there is no more turmoil, chaos, or harm perpetrated against Muslims. War can only be justified if there is a purpose. There must be legitimate and legal goals. The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not start any war simply for the sake of war. In Islam, slogans such as knowledge for the sake of knowledge, art for the sake of art, or killing for the sake of killing, have no meaning or place. Art must have a goal, war must have a goal, and wealth must be expended for a purpose for any of them to be legitimate and acceptable.

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Q: Why did the Islamic Group not join the forces fighting the US troops?

Ali Bapir: The reasons lie in the fact that it did not have a recognized leadership or a clear program. Those who resisted the US were a mixed bunch. There were Islamists, Ba'athists, criminal infiltrators, and foreign agents. Each had their own reasons for resisting the Americans. The motivation of those fighting to establish an Islamic state was not the same as that of those who wanted to restore the Ba'athists to power, and both had different motives to those who fought for money or had other financial reasons for wanting the Americans gone.

Q: Mamosta, how do you view the 'War on terror' led by the US? Do you think that this approach can bring justice and real equality to humanity?

Ali Bapir: Here I want to make a particular point about the concept of terror. It has been said that until now, when the US has defined the term terror, that there was no understanding of what terror meant. I question the notion that we have to wait for and accept the American definition of this concept. There is no reason for that. The Americans do not have a monopoly on thinking. Others are perfectly capable of using their brains to consider this issue.

We have to start with the definition of terror if we want to explain our 'war on terror'. 'Terror' is a French word or term, which means imposing your beliefs on others through threats, force, violence or death. This is the original definition of terror. This definition can be applied to describe many.[1] When I was in prison I told the Americans that it applied

(1) In my book, Some Popular Issues of this Age, I talk about terrorism in greater detail, Fifth Edition (2006), Tafsir Publishing House.

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to them above anyone else. The US has never denied that it wants to impose its will over others, whether by using economic power, or military and political force. It quite openly seeks to impose its values. If we define terror this way, the project which the US calls the 'War on terror' falls itself into this category. In reality, the American definition in effect equates terrorism with opposition to the US. Anyone who antagonizes or disagrees with the US becomes its enemy and the US characterizes its enemies as terrorists. This is a clear abuse of the term. Islam will be in the forefront of any attempt by any power or state that wishes to impose its beliefs on others. Almighty Allah says: "…and you are not over them a tyrant. But remind by the Qur'an whoever fears my threat"(Al-Qaf:45); "You are not over them a controller"(Al-Ghashiyah:22); "Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?"(-Yunus:99); "The truth is from your Lord. Then whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve"(Al-Kahf: 39). Islam teaches us that imposing your will over people is terrorism and we will oppose all those who seek to impose their will on others by force. At the moment, anyone who makes a stand against the US occupation and oppression is labelled a terrorist. I say this is wrong and the use of violence to achieve an objective has to be looked at in context. If violence is used to defend yourself and your legitimate rights, and to shake off oppression, then it is both legitimate and appropriate. The US does not hesitate to use violence against its enemies, not inside America, but in Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the world. How can it be legitimate for the US to use violence against its enemies but for others it is not? Islam's rejection of violence to impose beliefs on others applies universally, including the US.

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Q: In your opinion, to what extent do you believe that it is necessary to publicise the suffering and humiliation you and others have been subjected to? What are your views on the current treatment of prisoners in American facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and other prisons?

Ali Bapir: I think it is essential that people understand America, their attitudes and practices. On the one hand, they claim to be the protectors of democracy, human rights, freedom of worship and respect for all people, yet these slogans are not put into practice in their prisons. People need to know this and not be fooled by meaningless rhetoric. I have absolutely no doubt that I have a duty to expose what is happening and to do this I must talk openly about my own personal experiences. I believe that talking about those experiences is entirely justified.

If there was something positive in those experiences I have said so. The Americans asked me if, as a writer, when I was released, I would speak out against them. I told them unambiguously that I would and they then wanted to know what kind of things I would say about them. I replied that I would faithfully report what I had seen and heard, whether good or bad, in a totally objective fashion.

Q: In your opinion, how should people react to the behaviour of the US in those areas that it controls, particularly Iraq?

Ali Bapir: Human beings the world over have certain common hopes, aspirations and expectations. Everyone wishes to be treated with respect and wants individual rights and freedoms to be maintained. It seems to me that all right thinking people would agree that when someone is arrested

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unlawfully or without justification society as a whole should object. I am such a person whose rights have been violated based on false information. In my case, those who arrested me apologised but there is an old Arab proverb that warns us to be aware of those things for which we might have to apologise. I interpret this, in a practical sense, that before arresting anyone, reliable evidence as to possible guilt must be produced. It also, to me, implies that the use of torture and harassment or coercion of any kind to force a confession or to contradict a previously stated view is totally unacceptable and should be outlawed. For example, when I was being put under enormous pressure I told my captors that they could do what they wanted to me, even destroy me as a person, but that anything that I was forced to say under their torture I would later totally repudiate and tell everyone that I had been coerced. They wanted me to say things about myself that were patently untrue and I refused to go along with what they wanted, despite the fact that if I had done so I would have been, they claimed, released. I wanted, of course, to be released but I preferred to die than live in such a situation. Perhaps my stance gained their admiration to an extent but I know of many others who were mercilessly tortured and harassed. This kind of behaviour must be stamped out, prohibited and banned. People must not be tortured under any circumstances. If there is clear evidence and proof against someone and he refuses to admit culpability, there may be a limited justification for such an approach but when there is no evidence against a defendant the use of such methods is unjustified.

I believe that the whole of humanity must come together and all agree on basic principles that protect the dignity of human beings and safeguard freedom. Anyone, whether

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they be powerful, such as the US, or anyone else who do not adhere to those basic principles should be challenged and shunned. It is not acceptable for any individual or state to violate the inalienable rights, honour and dignity of any individual.

Q: Edward Saied has said, "It is a shame in the Arab world there is not a specific institution or centre to analyze US policies or analyze America as an empire, a superpower of the world." If we look at the Kurdish context, we find that his assessment applies equally to us as it does to Arabs. In fact it can be argued that many media outlets act as mouthpieces for the US occupation forces and their imperialistic policies while overlooking their questionable actions in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places. How do you account for this?

Ali Bapir: I think that there are some people who are more loyal to the US than the Americans themselves. There are parties in our own Kurdistan whose methods violate human rights, take away the freedom of our citizens, and humiliate them to a far greater extent than the Americans do. I find it very hard to listen to those who rail against US oppression when they themselves are guilty of the same, or worse, and have behaved in this way long before the Americans ever came. I do not know how they have the nerve to do that. I have heard of people being imprisoned in Kurdish details for anything up to 5 years without ever being charged with any crime and without any evidence ever being produced against them. Those who did this to their fellow citizens have no right to criticize the Americans.

I would also argue that those who have tied their future to the US are in no position to speak out against the Americans. No one who wants to criticize the Americans cannot be in

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hock to them but rather must garner his support from the grassroots, from his people, and not put himself in a position where he is beholden to those who have wealth and power. Anyone who is in that situation cannot talk about the shortcomings of the US. They do not have the integrity to do so.

Q: Mamosta, based on your contact with American soldiers, how would you sum them up? Do you believe that God created America to lead the world?

Ali Bapir: I would say that if humanity was a herd of cattle then the Americans would make excellent cowboys! They operate on the assumption that power is all that matters. However, I would say that all Americans cannot be judged on the basis of their soldiers, and even the soldiers themselves were a mixture. Some showed compassion and clearly had a conscience, and were capable of mercy and pity. Some of them criticized the policies and actions of their own government. Every nation has good and bad people within it. When the US determined to start the war against Iraq and remove the Ba'athist regime, there were many in the US who opposed the policy and went on protest rallies and demonstrations. It was not a universally accepted policy. It would clearly be ludicrous to think that all Americans condone the policies of their government; there are very many who do not. The current administration has tarnished the image of the American people. One problem is that there is too much freedom of expression in the US, a situation that does not pertain in Kurdistan, so when people see US policy they think that it is a reflection of the opinion and will of the whole American people. However, if you look deeper it is obvious that it is not like that at all. It makes no sense to me to regard all Americans as being the same. I observed the American personality

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in a military context, not a political one, and those military personnel were, in general, not cultured or highly educated. They were different from the British. Even their interrogators were different. My conclusion, based on my observations, is that these were not people who had the capacity to run human affairs globally or even to monitor them. No doubt the US has the power to bring all of humanity under its control but bringing people under control is a very different thing from having the ability to guide and help them to advance.

Q: You were unlawfully arrested by the Americans and subsequently wronged and humiliated by them. What message do you want to send to ordinary American citizens?

Ali Bapir: I want them to understand that whatever the US government and its politicians do in a democracy, the responsibility ultimately lies with the people themselves. Voters have a responsibility to ensure that any government that they elect acts responsibility and call the government to account when it deviates from basic humanitarian standards or pursues policies that harm the American people. In a functioning democracy there are ways of doing that, including taking part in demonstrations, signing petitions, lobbying elected officials, and raising their concerns with the media. All Americans have a responsibility and a duty to protect their nation's reputation and prevent their country being seen by the rest of the world as a self-appointed imperial power. Americans must be aware of the image that their government is projecting of their country on their behalf and, if they want to ensure that the image projected is the one they believe best reflects them as a people, they have to take active steps to make their government act accordingly. It is not acceptable for any citizen to abrogate their responsibilities totally to elected representa-

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tives; if they do so, they cannot complain that the rest of the world assumes that the government claims that it acts on behalf of, and with the approval of, the whole country are true.

Q: Let us move to another topic. Do you think you learned anything while in prison?

Ali Bapir: I learned many things while in prison but if I had to pick out just one it would be that if you have a direct relationship with Almighty Allah, no matter what circumstances you might find yourself in, no matter what trials you might have to endure, you will prevail. Even solitary confinement in a cell can become as normal as your desert home if you have the comfort of Allah to see you through.

In prison I prayed that Allah might secure my release because I was so unhappy but I learned that Allah's blessing on me was to give me the strength to cope with the situation I found myself in and through his bounty I was guided to a deeper understanding of Islam and an even more profound faith. I learned that the more one was connected to Allah, bound by His law, and given over to His will, He would open the doors of mercy and make those very difficult and hard things that had to be endured easier to bear. He would ease the pain and suffering, no matter what the nature of the circumstances.

Q: Do you believe that, in due course, Mamosta Ali Bapir will be seen by others as an important Islamic figure, that having endured prison, had much to offer, based on his experiences both before and after his arrest, to those seeking to understand the events surrounding the American-led invasion of Iraq and to a wider understanding of Islam?

Ali Bapir: The Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) in his supplications asked Allah for help: "And grant me a rep-

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utation of honor among later generations"(Ash-Shu'ara:84). I made the same request on many occasions, and was promised by the Prophet (peace be upon him) that my situation would turn to my advantage, both in this life and on the Day of Judgment. I asked Allah to place me in the ranks of those pious people who have gone before me.

I believe that my words came to me from the prophet (peace be upon him).

Q: Do you believe that the Ba'athist leaders who repented because of you will, as they promised, come to you after their release and become your peshmargas?

Ali Bapir: I saw genuine sincerity, even zeal, in those I mentored. They changed to a remarkable extent and I believe that some, if not all, will honour the commitment they made to me.

Q: Can we return to the Islamic group at this point? Upon your release the internal politics of the Group had changed. How do you assess the new policies and strategies that the Group adopted while you were imprisoned?

Ali Bapir: In general, I think the Islamic Group continued with the same program which was set prior to my arrest. However, I believe the Group faced considerable pressures following my arrest and imprisonment. People were afraid to talk to the Group for fear of drawing American attention to them. Not only that but some people did not like members of the Group greeting them in the street. This created a very difficult situation for our people and, in consequence, both the leadership and the ordinary members became somewhat disjointed, looser perhaps is a better word, and less focused on our mission, believing, no doubt, that this was the best way

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to survive. We have to take into consideration the overall situation before reaching any assessment of their actions at this time. It is absolutely correct as Islam teaches that: "the verdict must vary according to the time, place and the person". I have talked over a number of these issues with brothers in the leadership, and I believe that a degree of softening of policy, even concessions, occurred in my absence. However, I understand that any judgment has to be based on the reality of the situation being faced and an understanding that changes are sometimes necessary to meet changes in circumstances. Having said that, I think that the degree of softening of basic principles occurred to a greater degree than the situation warranted, particularly in the changes to our programme and a number of key policies. Similarly, I would conclude that the changes in the Group's political stance were more than were needed to meet the exigencies of the situation. Perhaps if I had been in that situation I would have done exactly as they did but now, with the benefit of hindsight, I judge that the changes could have been kept to a minimum. I understand, of course, that often the leadership was faced with a choice between the lesser of evils and had to exercise their judgment as to how to minimize any harm to our cause and that is not easy. The legal case is always that you choose the least harmful of any unpalatable situations and my belief is that is exactly what our brothers would have tried to do, despite my observations on the outcomes. Depending on the will of Allah, even if they did not hit the target, as it were, they at least deserved some reward and appreciation for their endeavors and perseverance. When anyone makes a decision in trying times, even if that decision is later shown to be wrong, Allah's mercy is such that the one making the decision, in good faith, will be rewarded.

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Q: During your arrest, there were some within the Islamic Group who said that your arrest would lead to the Group becoming less extreme. Now that you have been released, those voices are saying that extremism within the Group will increase again. How do you respond to those suggestions?

Ali Bapir: I feel that I am at one with the Islamic Group. I have never felt that there were factions within our Group; we are as one and I am part of it. I am a servant to all of my brothers. As the acknowledged leader, I am available to all those who are part of our organization. Those that have made these suggestions do not understand me or the Islamic Group. I am not the kind of person who believes that it is acceptable to impose one's own opinions on others. The Islamic Group has never been used to, or accepted, being dictated to by one individual. We removed ourselves when one person wanted to dictate to everyone else. Having formed a new organization, we paid considerable attention to ensure that everyone was consulted over decisions and huge amounts of time were spent in debating, exchanging views, and persuading within our ranks to ensure that what we decided reflected all our members' views. On the other hand, if I felt that a particular policy was not strong enough to achieve the objectives we all agreed on then, of course, I expressed those concerns and took steps to ensure that we did meet our goals. I have to assume that I was made leader for a purpose. I presume that our leadership saw in me skills and abilities that they did not have but judged necessary for our organization to succeed. I can only assume that I do have some additional skills, knowledge and qualities not available to others within the leadership. My role as leader, surely, is to bring others to my level not for me to descend to lower levels of thinking. The

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Prophet (peace be upon him), gave me good advice when he said: "Almighty Allah has raised you to your position because of the suffering and trial you have endured, be aware and do not allow others to try to belittle you". From my perspective, my role is to lead the Islamic Group, including the leadership and the membership, to reach my level of understanding and I believe this is the mission given to me by Almighty Allah.

This is the first time I have expressed myself in this way but it is important to understand that I do not regard myself as being somehow higher or more important than anyone else, and it may be that I am the most sinful of all our Group. However, I bear a heavier burden than others and I know that my intellectual and spiritual levels, along with my relationship with Allah, are not gifts that everyone has. For example, we have brothers who think that if PUK or KDP become got angry with us that would be the end of the world. I do not believe that. We had a brother who thought that if he did not stand up for the national anthem in Parliament that he would create an enormous problem for himself. That proved not to be the case. Nothing happened, the universe did not end. I am an Islamist and act according to the tenets of my religion. I may comply with the wishes of some people in certain situations, but compliance and the humoring of some people has to have its limits.

If someone thinks that the Islamic Group will adopt a softer stance when I am not available and a harder line when I return then he misunderstands. If the situation requires compromises to be made, perhaps through external pressures, in any given situation then that will happen whether I am around to orchestrate the changes or not. Any assumption that my presence will inevitably result in a harder line be-

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ing taken is untrue, unfounded, and based on a misunderstanding of how leadership works in our Group. The situation now has created a new reality. Myself and others have been released from US prisons, and people now wait to see if the Islamic Group will strengthen itself, move forward, and expand while at the same time becoming more visible and more effective.

Q: The 22 months you were in prison were a crucial time for the Islamic Group, and Muslims in Kurdistan in general. To what extent were you able to keep in touch with events, through letters to and from your family and friends to influence what was happening?

Ali Bapir: As I have already said, I was not allowed mail for the first 7 months of my imprisonment. During that time, I complained constantly to my interrogators that I was being treated differently to others, even though I had been told that they had no evidence against me. I asked them why, if that was the case, that I was not being allowed to have any information about my family, the Islamic Group, my friends, or about the situation in Kurdistan. They not only prevented me from receiving my mail but also stopped me from using the phone, while others were given that opportunity. I also pointed out that some prisoners were allowed to see members of their family. Following my complaints, I remember one day they debated the matter amongst themselves and seemed to reach the conclusion that I was being wronged. I remember telling them at that time that, unlike the Ba'athists, I was an Islamist and I was Kurdish so I could only conclude that I was being discriminated against either because I was an Islamist or because I was Kurdish, or both. They said to me that my treatment was not based on either and that they respected

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Islam. I asked what the reason for my treatment was then and they asked me to leave so that they could discuss the matter. I went back to my cell and about 10 minutes later one of the interrogators came in and brought me 10 letters that had been kept from me. Many of them were, inevitably, out of date but they did contain information from those early months of my imprisonment. I asked that I be given any letters for me as soon as they arrived so that I could keep up to date.

With regard to letters which I wanted to send to my family and friends, the Americans put numerous obstacles in my way, including restrictions on who I could write to; to first or second degree family members - wives, children, parents, brothers and sisters. The contents had to contain only information on my health and well-being. When I was released I saw the letters at home, all of which had been censored. Anything that they had not liked in any letter they had blocked out. Similarly, letters that I received were also censored to block out anything of which they disapproved. The censorship made me anxious as I was never sure exactly what had been kept from me. For example, I worried that the missing line might have contained information about a loved one that had died or been involved in an accident. I sent letters first of all to my wife and then to my children, to Muhammad and Abdurrahman, to my daughters, and also to the little ones. My letters offered advice or condolences, depending on what news I had received from them. I tried to raise their morale by telling them about my situation which I characterized as being good. I assured them that I was in good health, both mentally and physically, and that they need not worry about me. I told them how I spent my days and did my best to make them believe that I was not experiencing any difficulties in

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any respect. I knew that they were very distressed at my imprisonment so I concentrated on advising them to continue to pray, worship and to support one another. I reminded the children that they must respect their mother and uncles, do their homework, and behave well at all times. I said that when I was released I would give a prize to the one who had memorized the most of the Quran. I was very positive in my letters and told them what was happening to me was of no account and that God willing, I would be released soon. I tried to use my letters to cheer them up.

I also wrote to my brothers, particularly to Kak Abdulwahid, who sent me a number of letters, and to Abdulwahid's wife. I wrote 2 or 3 letters to my father, and to my brothers, Abu-Bakr and Ibrahim. I did not know until I received mail that Ibrahim was still being detained. I wrote 3 letters to Mamosta Hassan Babaker and he wrote 3 letters in response. Kak Muhammad Hakim wrote me a letter, as did Kak Abdusattar and Kak Abu-Bakr, my brother-in-law. I replied to all of them. Other than these, all my other letters were to my wife.

Q: Did the letters you received from Mamosta Hassan Babakr and Kak Muhammad Hakim deal with any political matters?

Ali Bapir: No, they did not. If they had, I would not have been allowed to have them or they would have been so redacted as to make them unintelligible. The letter from Kak Muhammad Hakim contained information that he had tried to hire a lawyer for me. I told him that I did not want him to do that on my behalf as I felt that hiring a lawyer might call my integrity into question. I told him that he need not worry about me as I was not concerned about the Americans.

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I assume that my letter is still in his possession. Mamosta Hassan Babakr's letter let me know that he was fine, that he was concerned about me, and asked if I had any idea when I might be released. In my reply to that letter, I tried to give instructions through using Quranic verses and passages from the traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Receiving and sending letters was something I appreciated. I was sent photographs of two of my children, with which I was particularly pleased. I had worried that they might have been killed. I often looked at their letters and that cheered me up.

Q: Before the arrival of those letters, or opening them, did you receive any news about your family?

Ali Bapir: No, there was never any news.

Q: Because you had no news, you imagined that they might have been injured?

Ali Bapir: People think of all sorts of things in such situations. By God's mercy I was shown events in my dreams, including how things were within the Islamic Group, how members of the leadership, as well as others in our movement and my family, were faring. Almighty Allah showed me so much that re-assured me that all was well with those for whom I cared. Other than that I had no information. Many times the interrogators, no doubt hoping to apply psychological pressure on me, claimed that I was defending something that no longer existed. They told me that all the members were either imprisoned or dispersed and our bases closed down. They continued to pressurize me because they did not like the answers I gave to their questions. From time to time I wondered whether what they were saying was true and was very upset that it might be so. I asked Allah to show me the

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truth. In my dreams I saw that the Group was still in existence and that my family had moved to Hawler. That surprised me as my family had been in Suleimani at the time of my arrest. I wondered what had caused them to move to Hawler. In my dreams, whenever I was returning home, it was always to Hawler. I could not explain that until I was given my letters which confirmed that my family had moved there. They had done so out of fear for their safety and this explained why Hawler had become so prominent in my dreams.

Q: Who was the first person you spoke to on the telephone?

Ali Bapir: With my wife. They made the call conditional on us both speaking Arabic. I explained that my wife spoke very little Arabic and on the occasions that I spoke to her in Arabic she did not understand what I was saying. I remember writing to my wife that it seemed that the Americans had no place for the Kurdish language in their democracy because they could not find a Kurdish translator. I queried this claim and pointed out that there were numerous Kurds who were working with them and I did not believe that one of them could not have acted as a translator during my calls. It could take up to 6 months for some letters to be delivered and they often came in bundles of 20 or more. Their excuse for the delay was the lack of a Kurdish translator and so I started writing some of my letters in Arabic.

Q: In our first session, you talked briefly about the day you were freed. Could you tell us a little more about that day and the journey from Baghdad to Kirkuk?

Ali Bapir: You mean the day of my release? You constantly refer to the day I was set free but as I have told you I was always free, you mean the day I was released. That night

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in Baghdad I did not sleep at all. I knew that people would come to welcome me but I had no idea how many would turn up. I assumed that a few would come and I would be able to talk to all of them. I wanted to know as much as possible about what had happened. I was desperate for information. On that night, Kak Muhammad Hakim, Mamosta Muhammad Sinamoki, Kak Yusuf, Hajji Dilshad's brother, Kak Anwar Shemirani, and many other brothers were all there. I kept wakening them in turn to ask questions while the others slept. I told them to give me all the information they could despite the lateness of the hour and the fact that the night previously I had been held in some discomfort in a very unpleasant place with my hands bound. The journey in the armoured car had lasted nearly 3 hours. I had also fasted prior to meeting them all and, all in all, I was exhausted but I wanted them to tell me everything they could as soon as possible.

I did not sleep at all on that day. We came to Kikuk in the morning and as we journeyed Kak Muhammad and other brothers talked to me. When people realised that I was coming, they started to call out. I tried to respond to those and exchange a few words with each one. This carried on until we arrived at Tozkhurmatu, and we stayed there for a while. I washed myself and I was brought new clothes which I put on. Then we proceeded on our way. On the journey, I prayed that everyone would remain safe because I thought that there were far too many cars on the road. I asked Allah to look after those who had come out to greet me and ensure that no accident or injury befell them. Also on the journey, a number of brothers told me that circumstances had changed considerably during my time in prison. I wanted to ensure that given these changed circumstances, anything I said would be helpful and relevant. I asked Allah's guidance in ensuring

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that I did not say anything that would potentially harm my fellow Muslims or which was wrong because of my lack of up to date knowledge. The whole journey was taken up with me trying to acquire up to date information and answering questions or calls from my brothers.

Q: When you arrived and saw the size of the crowd that had turned up to welcome you, were you surprised?

Ali Bapir: I had no idea the crowd would be so large but I did have some inkling that there would be considerable numbers due to the crowds of people from all over, that came out along the road as I passed. I thought that there might be as many as 5000 people waiting to greet me, which worried me as I did not think the meeting place was large enough. In the event, the crowd was much, much larger - about 40,000 to 50,000 I am told. I certainly did not expect that!

Q: Did you see your family first or others?

Ali Bapir: I saw other people first. I did not see my children, other than Abdurrahman amongst the crowd. He was all grown up, and I am sure I would not have recognized him but he cried a little and shouted "Daddy". I asked him, in astonishment, if he was Abdurrahman and commented Mashallah. He was grown up and had become taller in my absence. My wife approached the car and looked in at me. I wanted to open the door and let her get in but it was very crowded and hemmed in. I realized that if the brothers saw my wife in the car they would stay away from the car out of respect. She disappeared from my sight and later she told me that when she saw me she had fainted. I did not see my youngest children because it was very crowded. I did see Muhammad and he came with me in the car, then my father joined us and we all travelled together to Suleimani.

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Q: The speech you delivered to the people in Chiman was well received by the secular elite and they clearly welcomed it. Was that proof that they did not really understand Mamosta Ali Bapir? The speech you delivered was very specific, particularly in regard to your stance after two years in prison. You acknowledged your gratitude to those who had worked to secure your release and studiously avoided blaming anyone for your unjustified imprisonment, while at the same time staunchly defending the rights of your people. Is that an accurate summing up of that speech?

Ali Bapir: I based my speech on constant principles, on Islamic principles that could not be changed by imprisonment, dejection, heat, cold, or any changes in circumstances. There are some incontrovertible Islamic principles, such as the necessity of loving one's people, submission to Allah's will, and the requirement to be sincere at all times to his people that underpinned my speech on that day. Other key principles included the need to see the positive, the good, in others and not to seek to blame or accuse. It is always better to accentuate the positive and not the negative, irrespective of whether, as I did, there might be a justification for being negative or hostile towards those who have wronged you. I understand that there are good and bad attributes in all of us and I choose to emphasise the good.

The Americans often suggested or implied that my continuing imprisonment was the result of information that they received about me from one faction or another. I had no time for that kind of excuse and, as far as I was concerned, if the Americans chose to believe those lies then that was their responsibility and they could not shift the blame on to others.

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Q: What was the first food you ate after your release? Where was that?

Ali Bapir: Kak Pusho invited us to his house in Baghdad and served us a wonderful dinner that included some food which I had not tasted for 2 years. He served us good food, though I was fasting, and I was exhausted because of the treatment I had undergone during my transportation to the place of my release. I broke my fast in his house and he brought an excellent type of dates and a tasty Mastaw, yogurt mixed with water, may Allah make his house lively. I had a superb meal! Mastaw was never available in prison and it was one of the things I was deprived of and missed the most for 22 months. From time to time they did give us yogurt but Mastaw or Doh were never available.

Q: What kind of food, that was available, did you like in prison?

Ali Bapir: My attitude to food is the same wherever I am, be it at home or in prison. I eat what I am given. My wife often asked me what kind of food I really liked but actually I have no great fondness for food. If I ever feel I am short of a particular vitamin or nutrient I might want a specific kind of food but, in general, I am not too concerned. I did not have a number of foods while in prison. I was pleased, though, when they began providing us with hot food even if there was no bread with the meal. On one occasion my wife wrote a very concerned letter to me saying that she was worried that my writing had become very untidy and disorganized, which she felt was very unlike me and even wondered if it was my writing. I replied to the effect that her writing was tastier than Kurdish bread which I had not eaten for the previous 22 months. I did enjoy having bread, so I did, from time to

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time, miss certain Kurdish foods but I did not long for them and, although I might miss them occasionally, that did not impact on me to any extent. Sometimes while in prison, the officials from the Ba'athist regime would talk for hours about food. I remember one drooling over the thought of cooked stomach or head of lamb and another going into ecstasy over the thought of rice and raisins! Yet another dreamed of Halabi Kuftah. They were forever talking about various types of food. They asked me about my favourite foods and I replied that I was happy with anything that was softer than a stone!

Q: Do you think that you were arrested through any fault of your own, or any fault of the Islamic Group? Do you think that the nature of your work in the Islamic cause meant that your arrest was inevitable?

Ali Bapir: I think I was arrested because I was a Muslim and for no other reason. I believe being involved in the Islamic cause and being a devout Muslim has the inherent danger of persecution, or trial. Even a Muslim living quietly in his home having nothing to do with any activity on behalf of Islam can still be tested by Almighty Allah. There is the potential for all Muslims to have to face adversity, sadness and trial.

I have no doubt that in my case there was nothing more than me paying the price of my faith as a Muslim. There was no evidence of any wrongdoing against me so the only possible reason for my arrest was that I was a Muslim who supported the Islamic cause. The reason for keeping me locked up, I believe, was that I practiced an Islamic way of life. When the interrogators questioned me, I told them that they should not give themselves a headache trying to understand me, it was very straightforward. I believed in Islam, and part

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of Islam is about politics, as well as Jihad and resistance, at the right time, and in the place. I told them I accepted all of Islam as it is explained in the Quran and the Sunna of the last Prophet (peace be upon him), and wanted to apply all of it if at all possible. I believed in the totality of the Quran and Sunna and all its injunctions and guidance. They questioned me about that and said that if I believed what I was saying, then I must believe in an Islamic State. I said that I did and they obviously interpreted this as a threat to their national security. That was the real reason for my imprisonment. I had done nothing wrong and they had no evidence of any kind against me. They did not like what I believed in and stood for as a Muslim.

Q: Based on your own experience of arrest and imprisonment, what advice would you offer anyone who is arrested?

Ali Bapir: My first piece of advice would be to accept the situation and understand that the suffering and depression that accompanies arrest is perfectly normal. Either he renounces his faith or he has to come to terms with the fact that as a Muslim he will suffer and will be put into difficult and uncomfortable situations. This arrest must be seen for what it is, one more test that he has to pass. He has to remember God is with him and pray to Allah to give him the strength to overcome the trials that are placed before him with flying colours. He must never forget the most important fact that he has someone who watches over and cares for him. There is nothing that affects human beings more negatively than despair and the feeling that no one is looking out for you. Anyone who is demoralized becomes not only physically incapacitated but mentally bereft, whereas the person has inner strength and a high level of morale then his body

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and mind can endure unbelievable hardships. My final piece of advice would be to remind him that Allah is wise and everything he does is to a purpose and if Allah keeps him in a particular situation he must understand that there is a reason and that it is in his interest, both in this life and on the Day of Judgment, to endure those sufferings. I would emphasise that everything is predetermined by Allah, the Wise, and therefore anything that happens to him is not the result of chaos or random chance but part of a plan: "Indeed, all things We created have predestination. And Our command is but one, like a glance of an eye…. And everything they did is in written records"(Al-Qamar:49). This point is crucial in leading to his acceptance that it is Allah's will that has brought him to where he now finds himself. I would remind him that if it is Allah's will that he is rescued from his predicament then that will happen.

Consequently, he must be steadfast and patient. In my situation, I was given the opportunity to be released only if I would agree to sign a document that contained conditions and statements that would have destroyed my integrity. I was aware that not signing could have meant that I remained in prison for an indeterminate time and that they were coercing me into signing, and so I could have signed and then legitimately disowned the document. However, there was a greater force working on me, which was the obligation as a Muslim to remain steadfast. In the end, the difference was only 24 hours but what a difference in the nature of my release. If I had signed, my release would have been marred by dishonor, whereas when I was released a day later I could meet the whole world with my head held high, knowing that I had not taken the easy route to secure the end of my imprisonment. I would say that the lesson for all Muslims is to be patient and never dishonor yourself by showing weakness in the face of coercion.

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Q: There are inevitably a number of episodes over a period of 2 years that are both sources of pride and regret. From what you have said, you can be justifiably proud about how you maintained your honour and dignity. However, is there anything during that period in prison that you regret or that you would now do differently if you could? In contrast, is there anything you did about which you are particularly proud?

Ali Bapir: I have prayed and thought quite a bit about that. I sought wisdom and goodness, Istikhara[1], from Allah and asked Him to give me the right words and the correct feelings so that I could answer wisely. By Allah's virtue I do not think there is anything I wish I had or had not said. As God is my witness, I believe that whatever I said or did at the time was correct. I was asked about some Muslims, including some of our own people, but I tried to shoulder the responsibility for all of them. I told them that I took responsibility for all the actions of the Islamic Group, military action, political policies and, indeed, everything else. I told them that they should not arrest anyone else or harass them. All human beings have their shortcomings and are prone to making mistakes and I, too, have my faults and weaknesses. I wish I had prayed more, made greater efforts to purify my soul, and spent more time studying the Quran. I think, perhaps, I should have worked even harder, especially with those around me, but with regard to my interrogations and my conduct with the Americans and matters of that nature, I do not believe there is anything I would have said or done differently.

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(1) A type of prayer you make when you are not sure whether to do something or not. It is two ra'ka' and there is a special supplication you make when you ask Allah to choose the right decision or action for you.

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Q: If before your arrest it had been put to you that you could avoid 2 years imprisonment and solitary confinement in return for dissolving the Islamic Group, what would have been your response?

Ali Bapir: I would have refused outright and accepted imprisonment. I think they knew what my attitude was from the very beginning, and even when they threatened to send me to Guantanamo I would not be intimidated. They told me to think carefully about my position as I could end up having no life at all except behind bars. I replied that I always thought about things carefully and, as far as I was concerned, no matter what others had said and done, I preferred even death to betraying my principles. In the end, I think some of the Americans regretted what had been said and done to me and found it shameful that I was being pressurized into agreeing not to say or write anything negative about America. I told them quite openly that when I was released I would tell the truth as I saw it, irrespective of what the Americans felt.

Q: If you ever became the president of a country, would you sanction a prison like Camp Cropper?

Ali Bapir: I would never countenance such a facility. If I found it necessary to imprison someone, I would ensure that the cells were of a reasonable size and that all the basic needs of those imprisoned were met. I would be particularly insistent on the provision of adequate lighting and the provision of facilities to allow everyone to keep themselves and their environment clean.

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Q: You were imprisoned for 2 years during George Bush's administration. If you ever met him, what would you say to him?

Ali Bapir: I would tell him that the greater a man is, the greater his mistakes are. I would want him to know that, in my opinion, he was the president of the United States and wanted his country to play a major role in world affairs but to undertake that role, the leader has to have a great and generous heart. I would tell him that his problem was that he held an enormously important position and, because of that, it was incumbent upon him to have all the characteristics of a great leader, including a solid core, a high level of personal morality, and a commitment to justice. Without those characteristics, the powerful leader just becomes a bully who deserves to be blamed and held to account for the misery he causes. I would end by telling him that history would judge him harshly for his actions in Iraq.

Q: If it is decided to deliver your greetings to the Americans you met in prison, including guards and interrogators, to whom should I send them?

Ali Bapir: I would ask you to convey my greetings to those Americans who applied the rules fairly and positively and never tried to twist them to act unkindly towards us. Those guards and interrogators carried out their duties properly, with good humour and did not allow their own moods to colour how they conducted themselves. Some did interpret the rules in the strictest and most unkind ways possible, and displayed no mercy or compassion towards those in their charge. There was a very great difference between those who acted humanely and those who behaved quite abominably. I

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once asked one of them who, when on duty, used to close the windows for up to 13 hours, why he did that. The nights were already dark and his actions meant that we were in darkness for much of the day as well. At that particular time there was no electricity so we had no light in our cells. His reply, that he did it because he had the power to do so and liked exercising his power, was disgraceful. I pointed out that we were human beings too and, eventually, later in my imprisonment, he said that he regretted how he had behaved towards us in the early days. He said that he had not broken any laws by doing what he did but he had just interpreted the existing rules as harshly as he could.

Q: Are there some among them that you would specifically like me to greet on your behalf?

Ali Bapir: Yes, there are but I am afraid that they would get into trouble if you did so. There are 3 or 4 of them whose names I still remember who were especially kind and considerate towards us. They were the ones who brought me pens and pencils, and when someone was ill, expressed concern and ensured that a doctor was called. Not all of them did that.

Q: After your release many people came to visit you to welcome you home. I took some notes at that time and was surprised at some of the comments made. Do you have any recollection of what was said to you at that time?

Ali Bapir: One thing that I was told repeatedly by those who visited me was that they had prayed for me. Another was that they were happy that I had been released and returned to them. I sensed that many did not know how to express their real feelings, I think some were quite overcome

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and did not express themselves well. This may be what you picked up on but I think you may have misunderstood what they were trying to say. Some expressed concern that my family and I had not been able to sit down for a meal and, all in all, what I remember were many fond and sincere expressions of warmth and pleasure at my return and genuine concern for my well-being and that of my family. I received similar warm welcomes wherever I went, including Chiman, Suleimani and later, in Hawler, Betwein, Halabja and various other places that I visited. When I was shown the recordings and films of the rallies, the petitions and placards made to mark the first anniversary of my arrest, as well as reading the articles written in the Komal newspaper by our people and others, I was immensely touched. I also regarded myself as in debt to all of those who had tried so hard to secure my release. I was amazed at the wide range of people who had campaigned on my behalf. In addition to the leadership and members of the Islamic Group, their families and friends, I learned of the support offered by the young and old, men and women from other Islamic organisations and so many Muslims. I found that all very moving and humbling. I really do pray that Allah will reward their kindness. They showed me just how faithful people can be. I was particularly struck by the two rallies in Hawler and Suleimani during that very difficult time that followed our arrest, when people had no idea what might happen to me or to the Islamic Group. They showed great courage at a time of uncertainty and no doubt some of them were subjected to threats and intimidation. It is to their everlasting credit that they remained steadfast and I pray that Allah rewards them.

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Q: If it is possible, could you please, briefly, define some of the words you use?

Ali Bapir: Can you be more explicit?

Q: War, for example.

Ali Bapir: In Islamic terms, 'war' is the use of force to promote truth over falsehood, and the realization of the Quran and Sunna in the life of the people. Falsehood symbolizes the tactics of oppressors.

Q: Prison?

Ali Bapir: It is said that "Prison is the grave of living people". That statement is entirely true, particularly in describing solitary confinement. On the one hand, prison entirely cuts people off from life, reality, and other people. You are alone with your lord, it is analogous to being in something akin to a grave, particularly solitary confinement. On the other hand, being alone with your lord enables the true believer the seclusion to worship at a deep level.

Q: Torture?

Ali Bapir: For a Muslim man, I believe it is the attack on morale that is more damaging than any physical discomfort. The feeling that you are being looked down on, held in contempt by your captors, is far more upsetting than anything else. That was so in my case. When I was first taken to the prison I had a few white hairs on my head and in my beard but after only 10 days my hair and beard were totally white. I put that down to the enormous stress that I was under in that early period as a result of the verbal abuse and torture I suffered.

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Q: America?

Ali Bapir: The use of power has always been central in American history, right from the days when the indigenous population, the Red Indians, were massacred and thrown off their lands, to allow the United States to expand. The use of power to achieve objectives has become the legacy and hallmark of that American expansion. I think they see all the other people of the world in the same way they viewed the native Americans, that is, as obstacles to their goals. If they continue with the same approach, that might is right, I foresee only a dark future for America.

Q: The Ba'ath?

Ali Bapir: The period of Ba'athist rule was a bad dream and it has passed. A nightmare that will not re-occur if Allah in his wisdom does not allow the US to fall into the trap referred to in the proverb; "He ran away from the calf but fell on the pig".

Q: Treason?

Ali Bapir: Treason is an unclean action and the greatest treason occurs when a human being betrays his lord. Those who do so will never care about people or the land, but whoever remains faithful to his lord will be faithful to his people and his principles.

Q: Loyalty?

Ali Bapir: The term is the complete opposite of treason and betrayal.

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Q: Parliament?

Ali Bapir: For me, Parliament, or the Council of Consultation, is the council which must be elected by the people to administer the country's affairs according to the law of God.

Q: Demonstration?

Ali Bapir: It is the proof of your existence. For your information, the first demonstration in the history of Islam was when both Imam Omer and Imam Hamza (may God be pleased with them) led one. This was after Omer declared his adherence to Islam and a few days before Hamza declared his acceptance of Islam. Muslims went out and walked around the Ka'bah loudly chanting Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest). This was the first demonstration in our history, and occurred at a time when some Islamists believed that demonstrating or going on to the street was a sign of weakness. They believed that you had to fight but that is not the case. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was himself in that group of Muslims who demonstrated around the Ka'aba. The non-believers thought something had happened and wondered why Muslims had dared to circumambulate the Ka'aba!

Q: Kurdistan?

Ali Bapir: Kurdistan is that area upon which almighty Allah placed the Kurdish people. Unfortunately, it does not exist on any political map. Fortunately, little by little, people outside of Kurdistan and Iraq are hearing the term. In cities from Baghdad to New York, Kurdistanis are coming to be known. I remember during my trips to various Arabic and Islamic countries, when I said that I was from Kurdistan I was met with puzzled expressions and an enquiry as to where

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it was. You cannot really blame them because it does not exist on any political map.

Q: Freedom?

Ali Bapir: Freedom is a state of mind in which a human being internally feels that he is not a slave, when he feels his hands and feet are not tied. I do not mean physically tied but metaphorically speaking. I reject the use of the phrase "not free" in relation to any Muslim who is held prisoner. He may be physically restrained but any true Muslim is always free in his mind. He retains free will, his soul cannot be imprisoned and his spirit can always fly to Allah's kingdom. When he contemplates the words of Allah he is free and, armed with his truth, he can never be made to say things that are untrue.

By contrast, the slave is not free and the prisoner is a person who says things that are against his conviction, then he truly is a prisoner because he has imprisoned his heart and his mind. He has no free will which means he is incapable of freedom.

Q: Mamosta, finally, is there anything that we have not asked you but you believe it is important for others to know?

Ali Bapir: Yes, I want to provide information which I omitted to mention in my previous answers.

The first piece of information is the names of those bothers that were arrested with me. Apart from Kak Tawfiq Karim, Hajji Abdulrahman Ahmad and Mamosta Dara Hamadamin, who were in the leadership, they were:

Ibrahim Bapir Watman, Zubeyr Kamal Hassan, Burhan Abbas Abullah, Sirwan Bayiz Rahim, Ali Abdullah Sharif,

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Mustafa Wsu Ibrahim,Muhammad Ibrahim Hamadrasul, Hiwa nacm, Ahmad Hassan, Hazhar Habib, Hawker Abdulhamid Saeed, and Kak Jamal who was a translator.

The second thing I would like to add is that on December 6, 2003, a delegation from the leadership of the Islamic Group, made up of Mamosta Hassan Babakr, Kak Abdulhamid Jalal, and Mamosta Muhammad Pamochy went to Baghdad so they could work with Mamosta Nasih Mullha Salih, may Allah forgive him, who was at that time in charge of the Islamic Group's office in Baghdad, and his deputy, Mamosta Muhammad Sinamoky, and other brothers in the Baghdad office, to plan an attempt to secure my release and that of my companions. While they were there, on the night and early morning of December 9/10 at 4:00 AM, suddenly, a large American force, complete with 2 helicopters and around 10 tanks and military vehicles, assaulted the office. They destroyed the outside wall and arrested everyone in the office, including the 3 members of the delegation and the deputy director of the office. He, too, was a member of the leadership. In addition, all male and female students of the Islamic Group who were at the office were arrested. There were 32 people taken in total, 17 women and 15 men, the majority of whom were students. The day before this happened, Mamosta Nasih Mullah Salih had left for Suleimani. The women were released after 3 days but the men were held for over a month.

My third additional piece of information is that at the end of the month of Ramadhan in the year 1426 H, 4 to 5 months before my release, for the first and last time, a delegation made up of members of the leadership of the Islamic Group, comprising Hajji Qasim Mustafa, Kak Muhammad Karim

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and Kak Abdulsattar Majid visited me in the Cropper Camp prison and we sat for 3-4 hours together under American supervision. At that meeting they provided me with news about what was happening in Kurdistan and Iraq.

A further point is that I recall a significant event in the prison that I have not yet told you about. One day the Americans, in addition to locking each individual cell, which was quite normal, also locked one of the small wooden windows in our cells. The cells remained in darkness for several hours and when it became clear that they had made the decision to do this routinely from then on, first our division, followed by others, began chanting Allahu Akbar. We banged on the doors of our cells with our hands and feet and generally made as much noise as we could in protest at their treatment of us. We demanded that our windows be unlocked again.

The prison administration and the guards were perturbed and quickly came to talk to some of us. After we had made them aware of our demands, they immediately re-opened the windows. Our protest succeeded and from then on, unless we asked them to close our windows, due to cold, insects or dust, they left them open.

There is no doubt that much happened during that 22 months. I have told you part of the story but there is still much to tell. There are many psychological and spiritual aspects of life in that period that cannot yet be expressed. What I want to say finally is that no human being should ever forget the fact that this life is a laboratory. A person's life span is a notebook given him to write his answers upon. If we all looked at life in this way, looked at ourselves with this in mind, then, whatever any of us is called upon to face, providing we are walking on Allah's path, we can accept without

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reservation, with enthusiasm and joy. Sometimes the experience of prison becomes the catalyst for success in this test in this life, while there are other people who fail, despite the fact that they are free from any power over them or coercion. They regard themselves as free but yet fail to meet the challenges that Allah asks them to overcome. Some people succeed in the test of this life through, and because of, their poverty while others succeed despite, and because of, their powerless and helplessness. Others, still, fail the test because they have power and authority. When any individual recognises the reality of this life this way, he will inevitably try in every situation that he has to face to act in the way that Allah has ordained and this is the path that leads to passing the test of life.

This is my final hope that whenever a human being examines this temporal, temporary, life he will remember Allah's words: "In order that you do not despair over what has eluded you and not exalt [in pride] over what He has given you. And Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful"(Al-Hadid:23), and will understand that this life is but a test that almighty Allah monitors. What a person does or says will be recorded, and if that is remembered then he will be extremely aware of himself, and whatever comes his way in life, good or bad, he can deal with in a balanced and appropriate way. Many people will go to paradise with their poverty and many will go to hell with their wealth, just as many will be cast into eternal hellfire with their power and many others will go to paradise still weak and helpless. Understanding that this is so will change how a person perceives life and make him more patient, more resolute and steadfast in adversity and good times alike. Almighty Allah says: "And

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We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned"(Al-Anbia:35). May Allah count us amongst those who have passed the test of this temporal life with honour and may we join the ranks of those the Prophet (peace be upon him) summoned to his banner so that we may follow him and enter paradise where we can drink from the Prophet's (peace be upon him) Kawthar pool to break our thirst.

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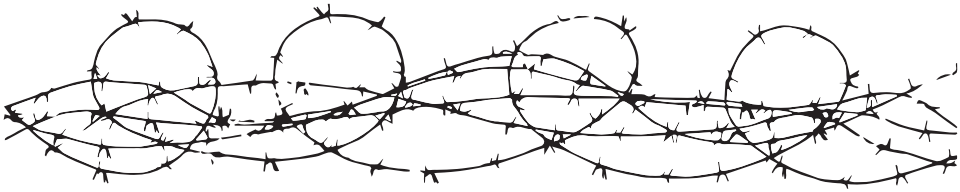
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ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

AND

PHOTOGRAPHS



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HEADQUARTERS
MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE - IRAQ
BAGHDAD, IRAQ
APO AE 09342-1400

MNFI-CD

Date: 12 November 2004

Detainee Name: Mullah Al-Bapir
ISN: 200117
Internment Facility: Cropper

Subject: Article 78 Review Board

1. This is to notify you that, in accordance with Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, August 12, 1949 (Geneva Convention IV), Article 78, your case will be reviewed in order to determine whether adequate grounds exist to continue your internment for imperative reasons of security, pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546. This review will take place on 26 November 2004

2. You are currently interned for the following reason:
You are a threat to the security and stability of Iraq due ot your ties to Iraq and Ansar Al Islam, and your prior position as a former leader of the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK).

3. You have a right to submit matters on your behalf for consideration by the review board. Please submit any statements through your camp Chain of Command addressed to MNF-I Detention Operations. Statements are due by 22 November 2004.

4. You will be notified of the board decision upon completion of the board.

Proof of Service:

Detainee # 200117 was served this notification on 15 November 2004 by personal service.

CPL
(Signature of person serving notice)

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الى مركز قيادة - قوة المعتقلة الجنسية - العراق
بواسطة ادارة السجن / كروير :

جواباً على كتابكم المؤرخ (١٧/١١/٢٠٠٧)، والذي فهمتموه أحباب الهجائر، أقول :
يا أنني أعتقد جازماً بأنكم فقتنعون تماماً أن الأحباب الأربعة التي بزرتم بها بقائي حجيناً هناك قد استنفدت أغراضها وفقدت فعوليها من زمان، بدليل أن المحققين قد أعتذروا لي أكثر من مرة، وصرحوا لي بأنه لم يبق لهم شيء علي، وذلك بعد أن فندت كل التهم الموجهة الي بحجج دامغة، وبينت أنها ليست سوى افتراءات وأقاويل مغرضة حاولت بعض الجهات أرادوا الإساءة الي والى جماعتي من خلال أمريكا أو قوات التحالف !- بل قال محققي الأخير قبل أكثر من شهرين :
كاد من المفروض أن نطلق سراحك منذ فترة طويلة إذ لم يبق مبرر لبقاءك هناك وقال : إني لا أفهم كما ذا بقيت هنا كل تلك الفترة !
لذا أكتفي بهذا الجواب الموجز :

١- أما كوني مسئولاً عن الجماعة الإسلامية سابقاً والآن والى أن يشاء الله العزيز الحكيم سبحانه وتعالى، فصحيح، ولكن هل العمل الإسلامي صار محظوراً في البلاد الإسلامية حتى يُعد كوني أميراً للجماعة الإسلامية تهمة أحجز بسببها أكثر من خمسمائة (٥٠٠) يوماً في حجز انفرادي ؟! أنا شخصياً لم أسمع بأن قراراً كهذا قد صدر، وان كان صادراً فليكن معلوماً لنا والناس كي نكون على بصيرة من الأمر !

٢- وأما القول بأن الجماعة الإسلامية قد ساعدت مجموعة (الأنصار)، فمقول عار عن الصحة، والجماعة الإسلامية لها برنامجها السياسي ومفهومها الفكري الخاص والمعلن وموقفها واضح من تلك المجموعة المذكورة، وهذا يعرفه العامي والأتي في كردستان.

٣- وأما القول بأنه كانت هناك علاقة بين الجماعة الإسلامية وبين النظام السابق، فهو قول عار عن الصحة ولا أساس له، وهذا هي الحكومة السابقة بقيادتها السياسية والعسكرية والأمنية بين أيديها والى أدناها حاضرة وحجة لديكم فلماذا لم تواجهوني بهذا الشأن، وأنا على يقين بأنكم قد سألتموهم، ولو أنكم عثرتم على أدنى دليل لما تخليتم عني، ولا طلعتموني عليه وواجهتموني به من خلال التحقيقات المطولة والمكررة التي أجريتموها معي !

٤- وأما القول بكوني مصدر تهديد للعراق، فمقول في غاية الغرابة ! كيف وأنا كمسلم ثم كإسلامي أعتبر خدمة مجتمعي والحرص على إيمانه وأمنه وعزته وسعادته فريضة شرعية علي، وكيف يكون إسلام الغالبية لديكم ضرراً وخطراً على مجتمعه ووطنه وقد أوجب الإسلام على أتباعه أن يبرؤا الأضرار والأضرار عن أوطانهم ومجتمعاتهم بكل ما في وسعهم !

ثم إن الجماعة الإسلامية التي تشير عليها الأصول الفكرية والخطط العامة التي استنبطها كاتب هذه السطور من الكتاب والسنة وصادق عليها مجلس شورى الجماعة بالإجماع عند إعلان الجماعة عن تأسيسها، لها قواعد معترف به من كل الأطراف السياسية، ولها مقرات ومكاتب

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A. THE TEXT OF MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR'S OFFICIAL ANSWER TO THE FOUR ACCUSATIONS MADE AGAINST HIM

TO THE CENTRAL COMAND/MULTINATIONAL FORCES – IRAQ VIA THE ADDMINISTRATION OF CROPPER PRISON

In response to the letter you sent me on November 12, 2004 in which you stated the reasons for my arrest, I wish to state with absolute conviction and confidence that the 4 reasons you cite for my continued imprisonment are unfounded and long since been proven to be so. As proof I would point to the frequent statements by my interrogators who told me that they had no evidence against me to corroborate any of the charges. They apologized to me for my continued incarceration. I provided them with conclusive proof as to my innocence and showed them that the accusations against me had been fabricated or based on nothing more than hearsay. I have no doubt that these fabrications were made by enemies who were intent, through the US or its allies, on harming me personally and creating difficulties for my group. There was, and is, no basis for their accusations and my last interrogator confirmed as much only 2 months ago, when he also told me that as there was no justification for my imprisonment, I should have been released some time ago. He stated that he could see no reason for my continued detention.

I would like to finish my statement by drawing your attention to the following points:

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1- I was, and am, the leader of the Islamic Group and will continue to be so until almighty Allah wishes it otherwise. I would ask whether the promotion of Islam in the Muslim world is forbidden and, consequently, as I am the leader of a group that does so, ask if that is the reason I have been imprisoned? I would state that I am not aware of any such prohibition and do not understand how my leadership of a perfectly legitimate group can be used to justify my imprisonment for 500 days, including solitary confinement, without a trial. If there is such a prohibition on Islamic organisations then that fact should be publicized openly and widely.

2- You claimed that the Islamic Group had helped the Ansar Group. This statement is totally untrue. The Islamic Group has it is own intellectual program and has its own specific political projects which are open to scrutiny and publicized. The Islamic Group's attitude to Ansar is clear, unambiguous, and known by all in Kurdistan.

3- You alleged that the Islamic Group had ties with the previous regime. There is, and cannot be, any proof of such an allegation. I invite you to ask the many senior officials and leaders of that regime, currently imprisoned here, whether they believe that the Islamic Group ever collaborated or co-operated with their regime in any way. I suspect that you may already have done so and I have no doubt that if they had provided you with even a shred of evidence to support this charge then you would have confronted me with it. Not once during all my lengthy and repeated interrogations was any evidence to link the Islamic Group with the Ba'athist regime ever produced.

4- You allege that I, personally, represent a threat to Iraq. I find that assertion surprising to say the least.

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As a practising Muslim and as an Islamist, I regard serving my society, defending its faith, security, honor, and happiness as my religious duty. I do not accept that as a devout Muslim, who understands his religion, that I could ever be a threat to that society or to my country. Islam requires its followers to protect their country and society to the best of their ability and that is a duty that I accept and embrace.

The Islamic Group is run according to legal bases derived from the Quran and Sunna which the consultative forum of the Islamic Group collectively approved from the day of the declaration of the Islamic Group. All political factions recognize it as a legitimate entity and it has numerous offices and active bases in many cities in Iraq, including Baghdad.

I would contend that the status and reputation of the Islamic Group should be sufficient to dispel any doubts about its agenda and myths about its activities.

I believe that my responses to the rationale for my continued imprisonment provide clear, powerful, and concise refutations of the charges made against me. For those genuinely seeking the truth, they provide a cogent argument for my release.

Monday
10th of Shawwal 1425 H- 26/11/2004
Krupper /117 CI

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B. THE SPEECH OF MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR AT A RECEPTION CEREMONY IN THE CHIMAN AREA

Allahu Akbar……..

I would like to start by thanking almighty Allah, the lord by whose virtue, kindness, and generosity I have been released me from an unjustified imprisonment. After Allah, I gratefully acknowledge and thank all those scholars, elder brothers, mothers and sisters who have come to meet me today. I am immensely grateful to all of you. I know your perseverance in managing to come here to greet me is a sign of your sincerity, zeal, fervor, and eagerness and, once again, I want to express my immense gratitude to you. I pray that Allah will weigh your support on the scale of your good deeds. My honorable and dear friends it is clear that after 22 months of imprisonment in solitary confinement almighty Allah has seen fit to rescue me but, in fact, I was so honored in prison by the efforts of so many ordinary Muslims from all walks of life who sought to secure my release. I want to take this opportunity of personally thanking all of them and acknowledging the role they played in ending my incarceration. Whenever a demonstration was held, signatures were gathered, assemblies called, or prayers said on my behalf, whether by women, men, eager youths, modest sisters, patient mothers or honorable fathers, I felt joy and an immense sense of pride, and I believe that for those who were behind my arrest, that wonderful support must have been very troubling.

As the Prophet (peace be upon him) says: {He who does not thank people, does not thank Allah}. Therefore I thank each and every one of you who through a word, a speech, an

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article or, indeed, through any action or step, stood up for me and defended me when I was wronged, or who defended any person who was wronged as I was. I extend my heartfelt thanks. I want to name those to whom I owe an immense debt. Those supporters include the political factions in general but in particular I want to single out Mam Jalal, Kak Masud, Mamosta Salahaddin Muhammad Bahaddin, Kak Muhammad Hajji Mahmud, Kak Kosrat, Kak Dr Barham, Kak Fazil Mirany, and Dr Mahmud Othman. I also wish to express my thanks to the Kurdistan Conservative Party's branches in Hawler and Suleimani, and all the other political factions, Arabic and Kurdish, Sunnis and Shi'ites, Islamists and non-Islamists, Turkmans and Assyrians, and everyone else who expressed their sympathy and made their feelings about my imprisonment known. In the name of the Islamic Group, and on my own personal behalf, I wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to them and to our brothers in the Iraqi Islamic Party. I was particularly gratified by the support I received from so many honourable Islamic scholars and Imams who worked so hard to collect signatures for the petitions organized on my behalf, who made speeches in my support, and who constantly interceded with Allah for me. I must also mention those mystic sheikhs and their disciples who worked for my release, as did many other tribal leaders, writers and educated colleagues. I must pay especial tribute to those leaders that many might regard as grey beards who played such a central role in the campaign to right the injustice done to me. Among them was Kak Ako Abbas Mamand Agha who played such a highly visible role, along with others too numerous to mention, and to all of them I offer my sincere thanks. I appreciate what they have done for me and pray that Allah will reserve His greatest rewards for those

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stalwarts. Only Allah could ever reward those who gave so generously of their time and energy.

On this occasion, I want to take the opportunity to talk to you who are gathered here, and to the Muslims of Kurdistan, about a number of important matters. First, the Kurdish people were deprived of their rights and exploited for years by successive regimes that ruled in Baghdad. Now, almighty Allah has changed the circumstances and made the situation in which we Kurds find ourselves considerably improved. Allah is the source of this new found glory. I am, as a Kurdish Muslim, genuinely loyal to my people and my country. I am always encouraged when I hear that the Kurdish political leadership is working in harmony, on behalf of our people. I am convinced that there is no people in any place or any period of time that has been able to achieve great things on behalf of the people without first having a sense of unity, of brotherhood and harmony amongst its population. While I was in prison we were eventually allowed newspapers, and from them, and individuals, I learned that the Kurds had finally put their own house in order, and that they now had a central governing body in Baghdad. With this re-structuring came the ability and the power to influence events and help others. Without the ability to manage your own affairs, it is impossible to have any impact on the world around you. The granting of this opportunity has to be received with appreciation and gratitude. Almighty Allah says: "And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My Punishment is severe'"(Ibrahim:7). Scholars say that thanks to Allah involves three things: you must acknowledge that this blessing comes from God; you must literally thank Him openly in speech; and practically use this blessing in ways that please

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Allah. Almighty Allah bestowed his blessing on the Quresh and they became the leaders of Arabs. Allah reminded them of His blessings, which were the peace he enabled through the holy Ka'abah and the economic problems he had resolved for them, and by so doing provided them with both food and security: "For the accustomed security of the Quraysh – Their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer – Let them worship the Lord of this House, Who has fed them, [saving them] from hunger and made them safe, [saving them] from fear"(Quraish:1-3).

Today, Kurds enjoy security in their own land. This is a great blessing, and there is a further great blessing in the form of sound economic development. This blessing must be received and welcomed, and Allah's bounty must be used in a way that is pleasing to Allah. I hope that our people, along with their political leadership, their scholars, their writers, and all people, no matter what their background or occupation will help one other so that almighty Allah will continue to shower his grace on us and in order that we prove worthy of even greater blessings from Him: "'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe"(Ibrahim:7).

I am really optimistic. I hope our Muslim people in Kurdistan will be deserving of Allah's favor and blessing. Having said that, I want to warn you that there are some people who are jealous of the Kurdish people. I am only too aware of that personally. Almighty Allah has turned his gaze on Kurds after a long period in which we have been disadvantaged, deprived of our rights, many of which have been mercilessly violated. This turning of Allah towards the Kurdish people is evidence of Allah's kindness which our Muslim brothers,

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including Arabs and Turkmens, and those from neighboring countries, must rejoice in. They should be overjoyed that Allah has bestowed his favour on their Muslim brothers. However, the Kurdish people, particularly their political leadership, must be far sighted, open hearted and clever. I was delighted when I found out that the Kurdish political leadership had made progress towards openness and transparency in their dealings with other people and nations, particularly those that live with us in Iraq. Let us learn lessons from those who deprived Kurds and non-Kurds alike of what they were entitled to. They wanted everything for themselves and did everything for themselves. We must learn lessons from them. Let us move forward positively in our dealings with others, not with revenge in our hearts but in a spirit of tolerance and openness. I believe that Kurdish people are rightly famous for two things; their bravery and their pure hearts. Kurdish people benefit from those characteristics. We are living in our heyday and the wind blows in our favour and to our benefit. Now is the time to listen to the voices of the masses and take account of their views. Whenever people are treated as if they matter, whenever they are given proper respect, for me, as a Muslim and an Islamist, is a source of great pleasure. When people matter then the political leadership moves in the right direction, but whenever the political leadership acts without consultation and simply enforces its will on its people, as the Ba'athists did, it is bound to fail in the end.

It is a reason for rejoicing when a free and fair election can be held. Allah refers to such matters when he talks of those: "whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves", a phrase that is part of a wider injunction to use the benefits bestowed by him of the aya 38 in sura As-Shura: "And those who have responded to their lord and established

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prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend"(As-Shura:38). As we can see, almighty Allah, the high and the great, put carrying out shura and consultation among Muslims between prayer and zakat. Clearly, then, prayer and zakat are two of the pillars of Islam, and this means that almighty Allah is telling all of us who are Muslim that conducting affairs through consultation and seeking each other's opinions is just as much an obligation as prayer and zakat. It is a pillar of our religion. If we continue on the road upon which we have embarked and everyone is given respect and the opportunity, as at this gathering, to express their views, I have no doubt that we will all gain. The fact that both administrations co-operated in the preparation for this event bodes well for the future and we thank them. It is in their best interests to continue working together in this way; the more they give chances to others, the more they prove that they are true and can be trusted by the people. It is clear that religious Islamists, those who themselves follow Muhammad Al-Mustafa and the book of Allah, must lead. They must spring up and emerge from our society. Being rooted in the traditions and culture of this country and its people, they share in the ownership of our goals, they are participants with the people, not separate from them. Allah says: "As for the foam, it vanishes, [being] cast off; but as for that which benefits the people, it remains on the earth"(Ar-Ra'd:17). Anything that benefits people, whether it comes from me as an Islamist, or from others, will remain. If I make a mistake, then it can be rectified. If we all give each other a chance and respect one another, whatever is good for the people and for the government will remain and survive, and whatever is not useful and is not in the best interests of the people

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will disappear. Certainly all here are Muslims and religious people, and our people are Muslim and religious too. We are certain that whatever the law of Allah dictates, whatever was revealed in the book of Allah, and whatever came from the Sunna of the Prophet are all beneficial, and living our lives according to those revealed tenets leads to glory and happiness for all people in this life and on the Day of Judgment. Allah's message is not only for Muslims but applies equally to non-Muslims. Almighty Allah says: "You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient"(Al-Imran:110). This means that you are the best group from the best nation (ummah), the ummah of Muhammad. Your duty is to stand up for all that is good in humanity and oppose vice wherever it is found. We all interpret Allah's words in our own way but we share a common faith in Him and recognize that Allah rewards those who keep faith with him by doing our duty as Muslims. Our duty is to do as much good as we can and to root out evil where we find it, whether at the individual, family, local community, city or national levels.

At the end I say:

The reason that my release was delayed for one day is that at the last minute the Americans put conditions on my release that I refused to accept. I told them bluntly that if I stayed for 100 years more in prison, I would still not agree to the conditions they set for my release. Later, an American colonel, who was often friendly towards me, said that he was surprised at my stance and that he was sure that if he had given many of

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the others the opportunity of release that they would have jumped at the chance, even if there were 50 conditions. He said that many would have signed whatever was put in front of them to secure their release. He expressed his surprise that I was willing to go back to imprisonment in a cell 2m by 2m rather than sign his document. He asked me again if I was really sure that I wanted to take such a stand. I assured him that I was and he replied that he felt honoured to know me and he wished that he had the authority to order my release, and those of others in a similar position, without conditions. I thanked him for his kind words but said that I was only a simple Kurdish Muslim but did ask him whose permission, exactly, he needed to authorize my release. He told me that he answered to a general and if he did not agree to my release then it could not go ahead. I said that just as he had a general to whom he answered, I had Rabbulalamin, the Lord of All Worlds, and just as he did not have the power to agree to my release, I did not have the power to sign a document that was so clearly against the tenets of my religion, my faith, and the faith of my people. I told him that I would happily return to my cell. I was wearing my Kurdish dress, as I am now, and I told the colonel that having kept me for 2 years without any reason, and he had acknowledged that fact on many occasions and apologised for the treatment I had received, I did not understand how he still did not know on what basis I was detained. It sounded like an excuse to me but he claimed that any rationale for my imprisonment had not been shared with him and only his superiors were privy to that information. I said to him that if he felt he had no choice other than to obey his orders, even though he did not think they were justified, then he would understand that I, too, had no option other than to carry out Allah's wishes in this matter and

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that meant that I could not possibly sign a document that was so obviously wrong in terms of my religious beliefs and returned to my cell. When he returned yesterday, he accompanied us, showing great respect to the Presidency Council of Ministers. I want to thank Kak Pusho Ibrahim Dizayee who received us and invited me to his house and showed me great honour. I thank him most sincerely. When we were saying our goodbyes, the colonel said to me that there was one last thing he wanted to say to me which was that I was now free and that he hoped that he would hear of the many good things I would now do. Once again I thanked him for his good wishes and kind opinion of me, and that I too had one last word for him. I assured him that I would continue to do whatever good that I could, God willing, building on what I had accomplished before my imprisonment. I recounted my pride in the many demonstrations, some numbering 50,000 people, that had been held in my support and the numerous petitions collected for me. I also told him of my pleasure at learning that despite the fear of reprisals that many might have felt at supporting the Islamic Group in the elections, my Group succeeded in gaining enough votes to ensure that we had 6 members in the Kurdistan Parliament and 2 members in the Baghdad parliament. This, to me, is the best witness and proof that people so us as honourable and valued the actions we took. That is why people voted for us; we gained the respect of the people.

So, to my brothers, sisters, the zealous youth, and the modest sisters, the soft-hearted mothers and the respected fathers, the sincere Mamostas and scholars, I repeat my thanks to you all on behalf of myself and on behalf of my brothers in the leadership of the Islamic Group and on behalf of brothers from the bases. To anyone who contributed through

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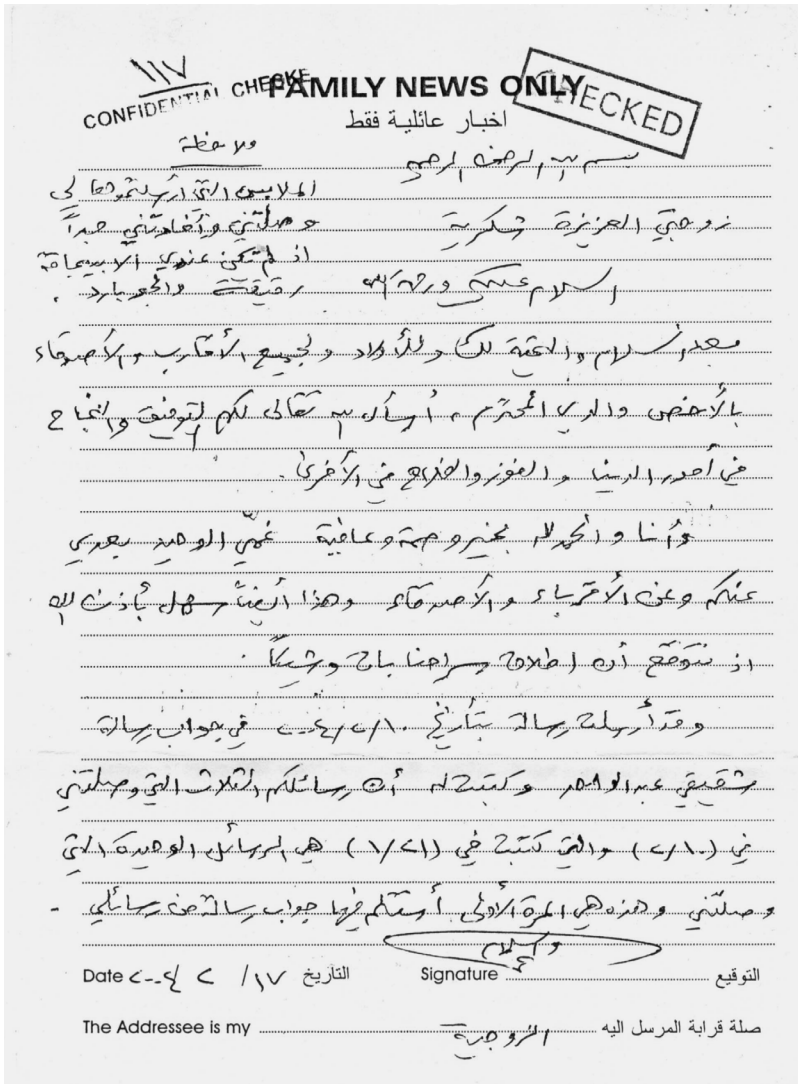
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prayers and the shedding of tears ,or in any other way, such as demonstrations and through the endurance of pain in coming to meet me, I acknowledge my debt of gratitude. I feared that one or more of you, God forbid, might have been injured because of the numbers here and that would have hurt me deeply. I appreciate all of you. And, finally, I have one sincere and brotherly piece of advice for you, which is that the religion of Allah needs zeal and commitment, as well as reason, expertise and wisdom. The Prophet's companions, may God bless them, were sincere and brave zealots but they were also wise and had expertise. Let us be like them and follow their path and that of all those scholars and leaders who combined zeal and brave with wisdom and expertise.

Chiman 29/4/2005.

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ملاحظة

الرجاء الرد على الرسالة التي أرسلتها لكم بتاريخ ١٠/٧/٢٠٠٧ وتأكيد استلامكم لها.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

زوجتي العزيزة شكرية

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

بعد السلام والتحية لك ولأولاد وجميع الأقارب والأصدقاء بالأخص والدي المحترم، أرجو من الله تعالى لكم التوفيق والنجاح في أعمالنا والفوز والخلاص من الأعداء.

نحن والحمد لله بخير وصحة وعافية، نسأل الله العلي العظيم أن يحفظكم عنه وعن الأشرار والأعداء، وهذا ما نتمناه بإذن الله.

لا نتوقع أن الطريق سيكون سهلا وسالكا.

وقد أرسلت رسالة بتاريخ ١٠/٧/٢٠٠٧ في جواب رسالة شقيقي عبد الله، وكتبت له أن رسائلكم الثلاث التي وصلتني في (٧/١٠) والتي كتبت في (١٧/٦) هي الرسائل الوحيدة التي وصلتني، وهذه هي المرة الأولى أستلم فيها جواب رسالتي.

والسلام

Date ٢٠٠٧/٧/١٧ التاريخ Signature التوقيع

The Addressee is my الزوجة صلة قرابة المرسل اليه

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C. MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR'S SELECTION OF LETTERS TO HIS WIFE AND SON

MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE, SHUKRIA KHAN,

FEBRUARY 17, 2004
In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful
My dear wife, Shukria
Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah

After my greeting to you and to the children, and to all relatives and friends, particularly my honorable father, I ask God to give you success in this world and in the next.

I am, thanks to Allah, in good health, and my only concern is being away from you, from my relatives and friends, but I am coping as my release will be soon.

Indeed, I sent a letter on Feb10, 2004 in response to the letter from my brother, Abulwahid, in which I wrote that your three letters dated Feb 10th were the only letters I have received, and this was the first time I had received a reply letter to my letters.

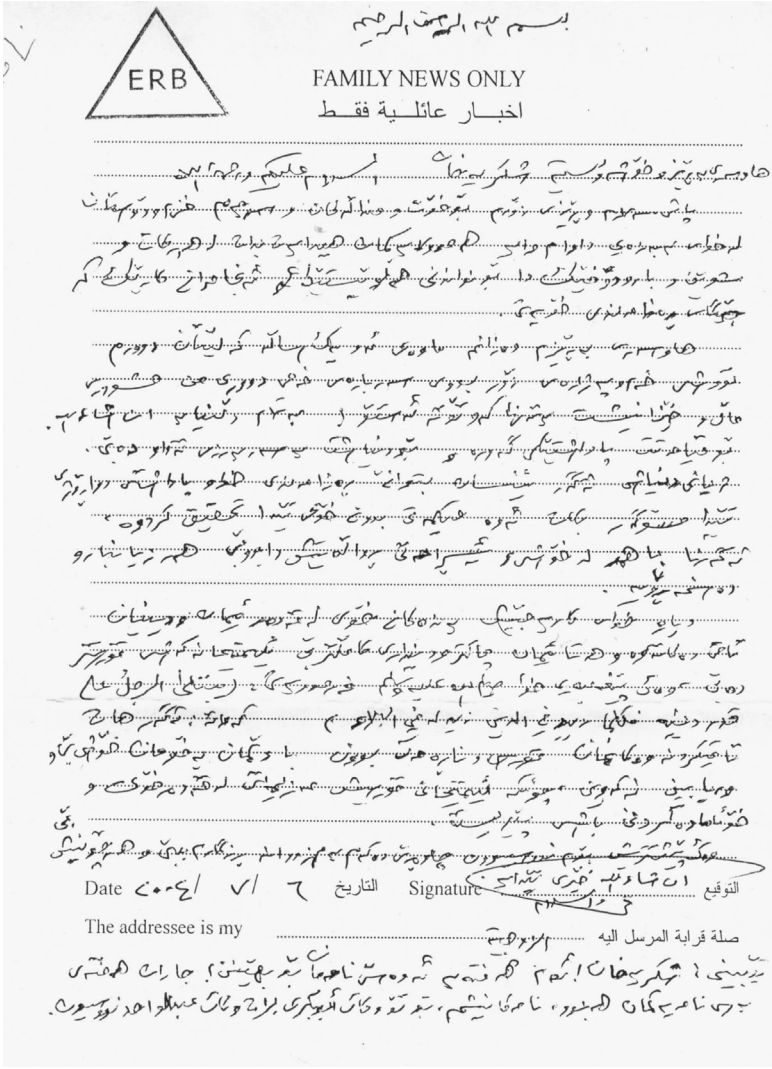
Wassalam

Note:

I received the clothes you sent me and they were very welcome because the weather was so cold.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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Date ٢٠٠٤/ ٧/ ٦ التاريخ Signature التوقيع

The addressee is my صلة قرابة المرسل اليه

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MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE, SHUKRIA KHAN,

JULY 6, 2004

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah

After my greetings and paying my respect to you and the children, and to the rest of my relatives and friends, I ask Allah, the Merciful, to guide all of us, wherever and whenever we may be, to help us make a stand or perform a duty which pleases him.

My dear spouse, I know that since I have been away from you for the last one and a half years you have grieved and you are managing the affairs of the home alone! Be sure that, God willing, you will be greatly rewarded on the Day of Judgment, and in the meantime you will live your life honorably.

In this life, if anyone could please his Lord and be assured of a just reward on the Day of Judgment, he would have fulfilled the very reason for his existence. If he has not secured that reward, then whatever happiness he appears to have enjoyed in this life would be totally meaningless and worthless.

Allah, the Wise, tests his servants according to their strength in their faith, the more faithful and obedient the servant, the greater his trial will be. As the Prophet of Allah, peace be upon him, said: "the man will be tried according to the strength in his faith, the more he ranks in faith, the more his trial will be." So, if our test and trial has been great and

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distressful for us, we must be happy and recognize that we must not fall by the wayside because our great trial requires us to show the resolve equal to it and we must prepare for it.

As I wrote to you before, I expect my release to be soon, and whatever happens Allah will make sure that it is good for me.

Wassalam

July 6, 2004

Note: Dear Shukria! This week they brought me three letters! They used to bring one letter each week. I have written letters to you, to your brother, Abu-Bakr, and Kak Abdulwahid.

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MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR'S LETTER TO HIS SON, KAK MOHAMMED, AND HIS OTHER SONS, OCTOBER 25, 2004.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

My dear sons, Kak Mohammed and your brothers and sisters,

Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah

After my greeting and regards to you, to your mother, and the rest of relatives and friends, I ask Allah, the Forgiver, to make you successful and to help you live honorably. This letter follows on from my previous letter and I will continue to offer my advice to you:

1- Believing in Allah, the Great and the Most High, creates in a human being the sense of servitude and as soon as faith takes root in the heart it will bear fruit and produce flowers of servitude. We will be faithful as long as we continue to serve.

2- Prayer is the greatest type of servitude and worship. Servitude that manifests in prayer is rarely found in other types of worship. That is why Allah, the Wise and the Merciful, ordered the recitation of prayers many times during the day and night. Therefore, my dear children try to pray properly with due regard to the prayers' content, their associated rituals and the correct time. Do not miss any prayer, even if the world is collapsing around you. Pray in a state of humility, devotion and tranquility since you are standing in the presence of Allah. Try to think of the meaning of the various parts of the prayer and be aware at all times that you are talking to your Lord and be conscious of what are you saying.

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3- So when you pray, in addition to the calmness, serenity and dependence on Allah that you feel, you will also feel that you are protected from anything that leads to sinfulness or that would bring shame on you in front of people. Almighty Allah says in the Quran: "Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book (the Quran) and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do"(Al-Ankabut:45). So the hallmark of true prayer, as opposed to the one which is only for the sake of appearances, is that the true prayer makes the one praying shun sin, avoid bad habits, and anything that could be condemned. Allah has said: "Prayer prevents human beings from doing evil things!" This means that the further the person is from sins, the more his prayer is accepted.

4- There is no doubt that the avoidance of the occasion of sin is, of itself, not enough. The opportunity for real devotion and the best worship comes from being with like-minded adherents of the faith. The converse is true, being with those who are from Allah, have no faith, and give nothing to others is detrimental to any attempt to worship properly.

5- Remember your father and mother, particularly your mother, have the right to be treated with kindness and respect at all times.

Wassalam

25/10/2004

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MAMOSTA ALI BAPIR'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE, SHUKRIA KHAN,

DECEMBER 12, 2004
In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Praise due to Allah, the Mighty and Merciful, blessing and peace be on His Messenger, who was sent to Mankind and jinn.

My dear wife, mother of Shifa,
Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah

After salutes and greetings, I ask the almighty Lord to continue His guardianship, ensure your good fortune and increase your piety through His guidance.

The reason of writing this letter in Arabic is that the prison administration told me that currently there is no Kurdish translator available to translate my letters before sending them to you through the Red Cross. Probably for the same reason they did not give me your letters that were sent through the Red Cross. I have not received any letters from you since the one dated Sept 23! Despite that, I have written to you weekly but I do not know whether the fate of my letters to you is the same as that of yours to me.

If you receive this letter, please tell me when you next write whether you received my previous letters. I have written a number of letters to you and included in them important advice to the children.

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله العزيز الرحيم والصلاة والسلام على نبيه المجتبى للأنام والمحن

FAMILY NEWS ONLY

إخبار عائلية فقط

Date ٢٠٠٤/١٢/٣١ التاريخ Signature التوقيع

The addressee is my صلة قرابة المرسل اليه

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As for my situation, I am well, thank Allah. I do not need anything except more kindness and blessings from almighty Allah. Rather than being distressed by the cold or heat of the prison, I am busy reading the Quran and contemplating its contents. I have now read the whole of the Quran and I am also busy with continuous fasting, and sometimes with writing, and reading. I also spend time advising and teaching my fellow prisoners.

The reason of mentioning these things is to assure you that I am fine and in good health. You should not grieve because of my imprisonment, indeed, if I was not here safe and sound, I would not be able to do what I am doing right now.

As for the Eid, I advise you to be strong and to give gifts to the children with confidence and with cheerful face in my place. Do not show weakness in front of the children or others, and when Allah decides on the time for my release he will do it in spite of any obstacles. His will always prevails.

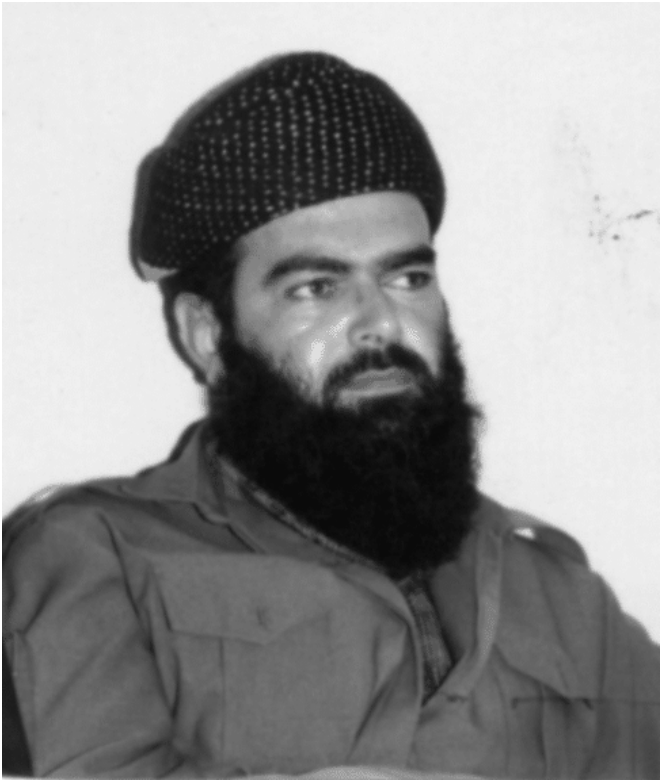
Wassalam

31/12/2004

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D. PHOTOS



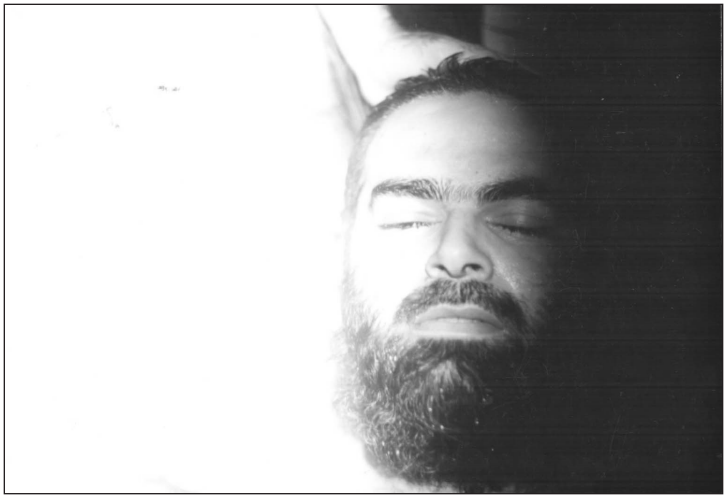
1- Mamosta Abdullah Qasre, assassinated on March 4, 2003 at Tasloja checkpoint.

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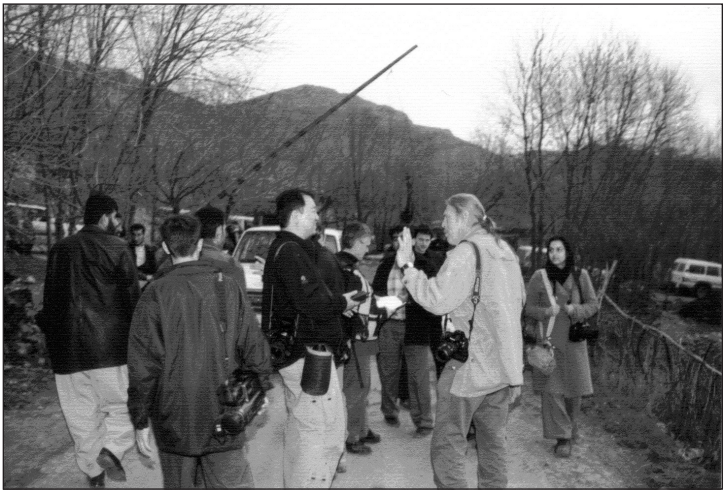
2- Mamosta Abdullah Qasre's corpse, Islamic Group's centre in Suleimani.



3- Mamosta Abdullah Qasre's body after he was placed in his coffin, Jihad Masjid, the night and dawn 4th/5th March, 2003.

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4- The tour by foreign journalists in Ahmadawa and Khormal area Feb 8, 2003.



5- Mamosta Ali Bapir with foreign journalists, Ahmadawa Feb8, 2003.

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6- The ruins of the Islamic Group's base after the US missile bombardment, Ahmadawa, Mar 21, 2003.



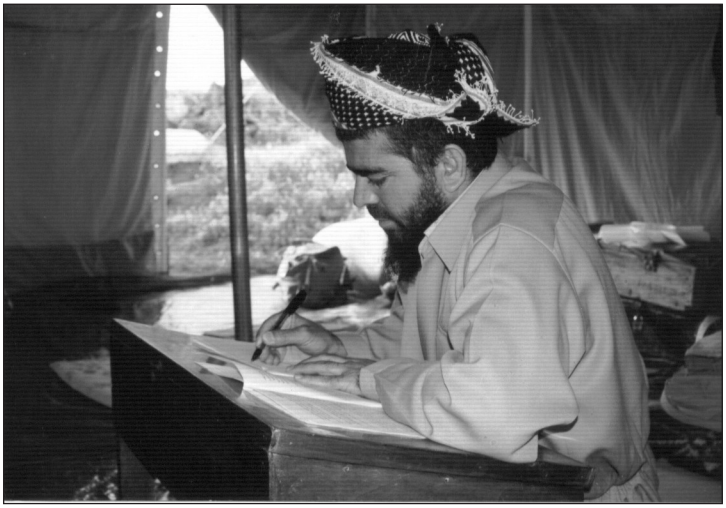
7- One of the martyrs of the missile bombardment on the Islamic Group, Ahmadawa, Mar 21, 2003.

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8- The transfer of the Islamic Group's bases to Darashmana area, Mar 27, 2003.



9- Mamosta Ali Bapir under a tent in Darashmana, sometime before his arrest.

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10- From the right, Bill Stewart, Mamosta Ali Bapir, and William Eagleton, June 23, 2003.



11- Mass demonstration in Hawler (Erbil), July 21, 2003.

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12- Mass demonstration in Hawler (Erbil), July 21, 2003.



13- Mass demonstration in Suleimani, Aug 2, 2003.

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14- Mass demonstration in Suleimani, Aug 2, 2003.



15- Kurdish Community's demonstration in London, UK, Aug 7, 2003.

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www.youtube.com/alibapir



16- A solidarity conference for the release of Mamosta Ali Bapir, Suleimani, July 7, 2004.



بەناوی خودای گەورەومیهرەبان

سایتی بەر لەنیستا ،رۆژی (۲۰۰۳/۷/۱۰) بەریز مامۆستا عەلی بابیر نەمری کۆمەڵی نیسلامیی لەلایەن هێزەکانی ئەمریکاوە دەستگیرکراو لەو رۆژەوە تا ئەمرۆ نە نازاد کراوە ئەهۆکاری بەئەنکردنەکەی راگەیەنراوەو نە ڕێگەدراوە کەکەسوکاری هاوڕێیان سەردانی بکەن. مامۆستا عەلی بابیر وێڕای ئەوەی سەرکردەیەکی خەباتکاروسیاسەتمەدارو تیۆکۆشەرێکی گەلەکەمانە، رۆشنبیرو قەڵەم بەدەستێکی بەتواناو کارامەیەو دۆستی نزیکی نووسەران و رۆژنامەنووسان و رۆشنبیران و تا نیستا زیاتر لە (٤٠) کتێبو چاپکراوی هەیە.

بۆیە ئیمە، ئەوانەی لەخوارەوە ناوو نیمزامان هاتووە ومکو بەشێک لە نووسەران و رۆشنبیرانەو رۆژنامەنووسانی گەلی کورد گرتنی کەسایەتییەکی لەو شێوەیە ئیدانە دەکەینو داوای دەستبەجێ نازادکردنی لەهاوپەیمانان و حکومەتی کاتی عیراقی دەکەین.

ز	ناوی سیانی و نازناو	پیشە	واژوو ئیمزا
١	عامر عبد الرحيم		
٢	دلير عمر		
٣	داود كريم		
٤	محمد كريم		
٥	عبدول محمد		
٦	كاوه انور قادر		
٧	خالد شاهو رعد		
٨	فاروق جميل كريم		
٩	هوان اسعد		

17- Samples of journalists' signatures in a campaign to gather support for a petition.

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18- Mass reception for Mamosta Ali Bapir after his release, Chiman, Apr 29, 2005.



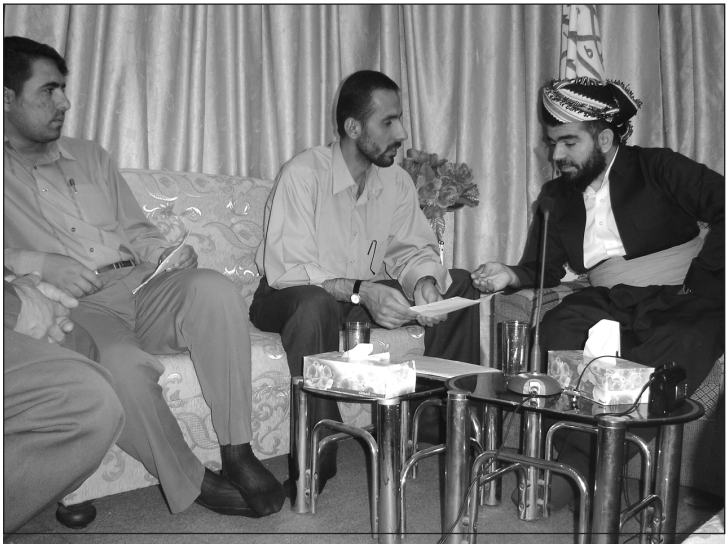
19- Mamosta Ali Bapir after his release, Chiman, Apr 29, 2005.

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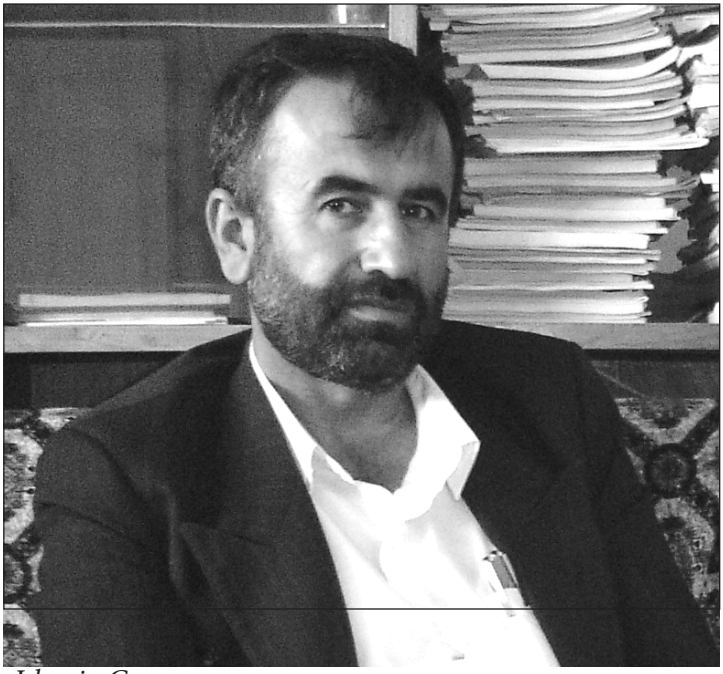
20- Mamosta Ali Bapir speaking with Hawzhin Omer, Hawler, June 13, 2005.



21- Mamosta Ali Bapir, Hawzhin Omer, Omer Abdullah Gulpi, Hawler, June 13, 2005.

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Islamic Group.



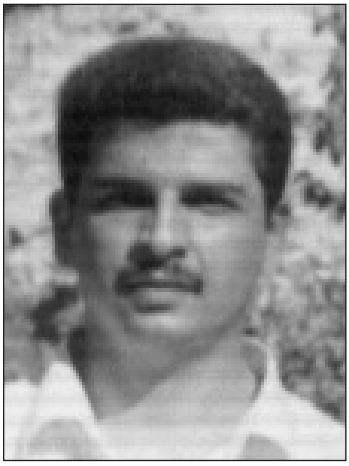
23- Kak Hajji Abdurrahman Ahmad, a member of the leadership of the Islamic Group.

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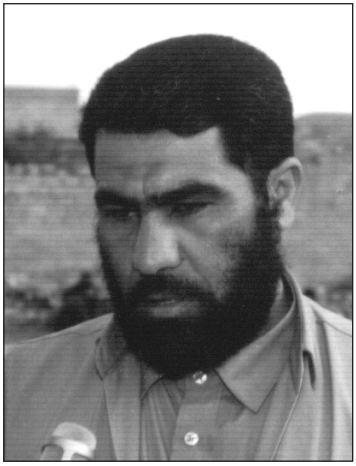
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24- Mamosta Dara Ahmad, a member of the leadership of the Islamic Group.



26- Ibrahim Bapir Watman.



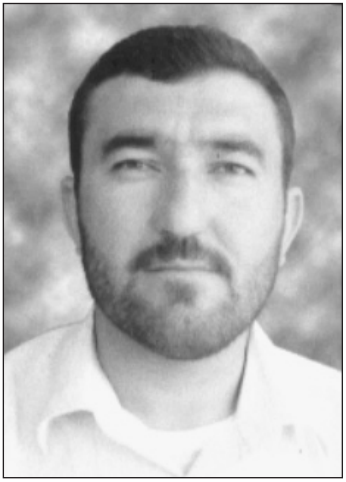
25- Burhan Abbas Abdullah.

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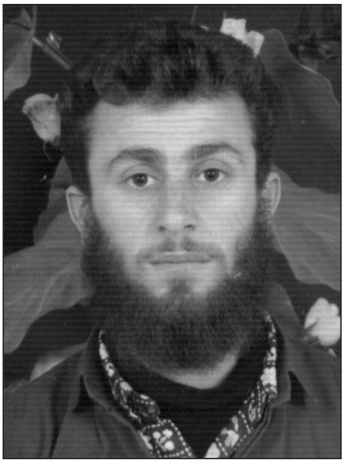
28- Ahmad Hassan Hassan.



27- Sirwan Bayiz Rahim.



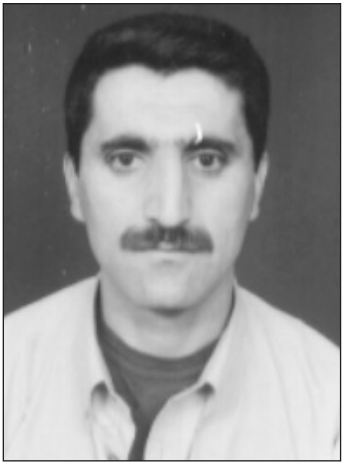
30- Zubeir Kamal Hassan.



29- Hazhar Habib.

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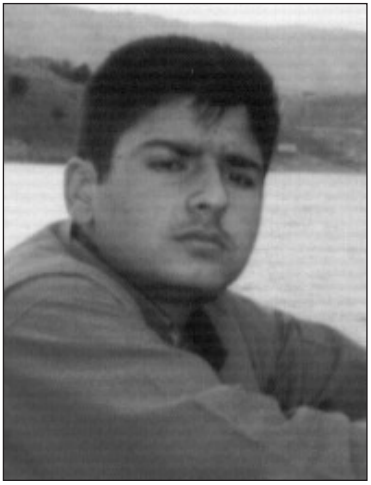
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32- Ali Abdullah Sharif.



31- Mustafa Wsu Ibrahim.



34- Hawkar Abdulhamid Said.



33- Muhammad Ibrahim Hamad Rasul.

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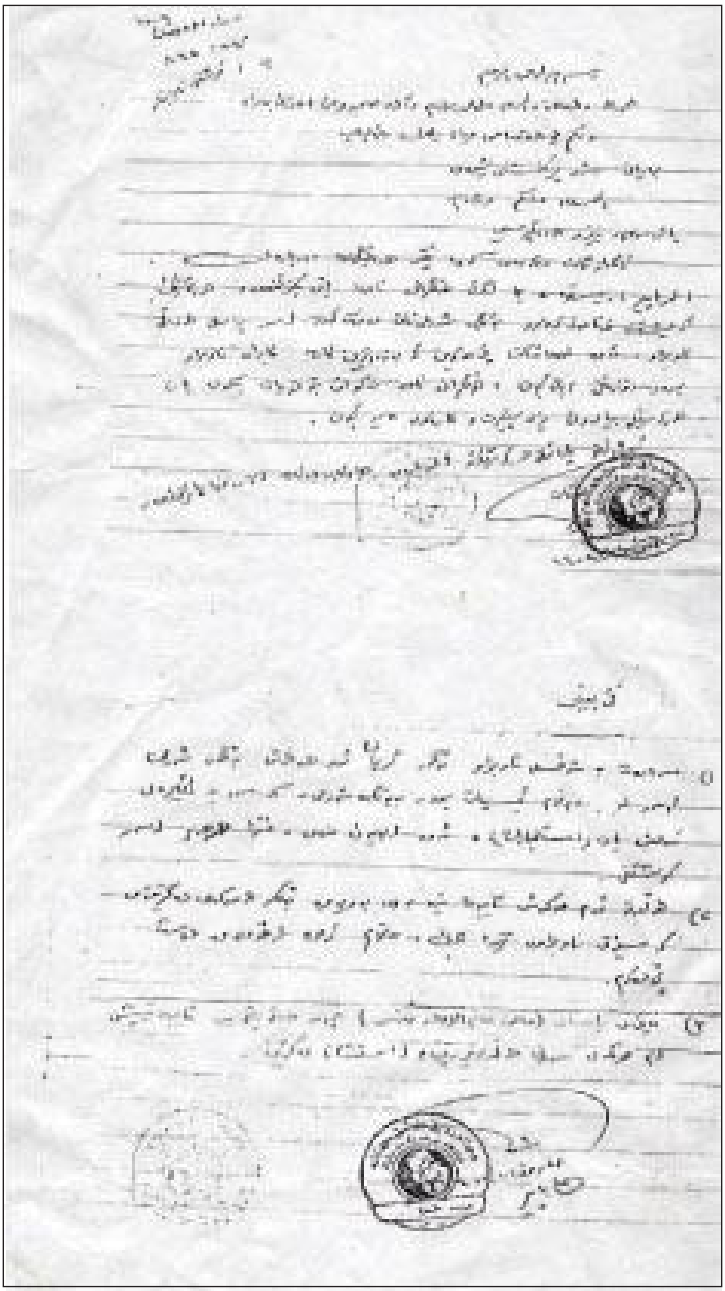
35- Mamosta Ali Bapir with some of the mujahidin of the Islamic Movement between 1988 and 1992.



36- A delegation from the leadership of the Islamic Movement visiting the PUK leadership in Qasma Rash, invited by the PUK leadership to cooperate against the Ba'athist regime. They are from the right: Mamosta Hassan Babakir, Dr Fuad Masum, Mamosta Ali Bapir, Mam Jalal, Mala Mahmud Azadi, Mala salman, and Mala Rsul Zangli.

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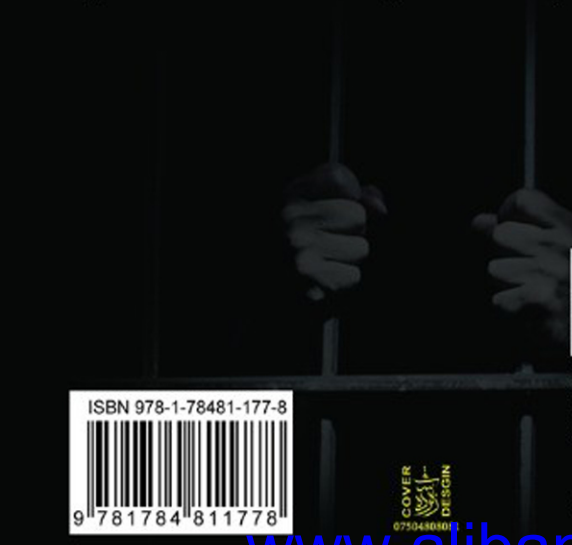
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VICTORY THROUGH ADVERSITY



He said, "My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant. So his Lord responded to him and averted from him their plan. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing" (Quran 12: 33-34).





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